

GENERATIONS
of the
FAITHFUL HEART

On the Literature of the South



M. E. BRADFORD



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M. E. Bradford

Sherwood Sugden & Company
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Table of Contents

Preface	11
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PART I

That Other Republic: <i>Romanitas</i> in Southern Literature	17
Faulkner's <i>The Unvanquished</i> : The High Cost of Survival	29
Fairchild as Composite Protagonist in Miss Welty's <i>Delta Wedding</i>	40
What Grandfather Said: The Social Testimony of Faulkner's <i>The Reivers</i>	48
Looking Down from a High Place: The Serenity of Miss Welty's <i>Losing Battles</i>	63

PART II

Rumors of Mortality: An Introduction to Allen Tate	73
A Durable Fire: Donald Davidson and the Profession of Letters	114
Ransom and the Elegaic: Self-Expression, Social Purpose, and Poetic Form	135

PART III

Toward a Dark Shape: Lytle's "Alchemy" and the Conquest of the New World	149
The High Cost of "Union": Caroline Gordon's Civil War Stories	157
Meaning and Metaphor in Donald Davidson's "A Touch of Snow"	175
Angels at Forty Thousand Feet: "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air" and the Practice of Poetic Responsibility	183
Dr. Percy's Paradise Lost: Diagnostics in Louisiana	200
The Beast in Todd County: Robert Penn Warren's "Dragon Country"	207
Index	215

*For my son, Douglas,
that the memory may be cherished*

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Preface

However rigorous and well-defined the thesis, almost any book, once it is completed, contains elements which mystify and amaze its author. This work is no exception. It has its origins in twenty-five years of teaching the literature of my native region, in personal acquaintance with most of the authors whose work I discuss here, and in a lifetime of residence in the South. Translating the formal components of particular Southern poems, novels, or stories into discursive terms, locating the sources of tension, and describing their resolution in an action played out in a recognizable Southern context is simplified for me by the sharing of idiom and habit of mind—of cultural expectation, as it were—with my subjects. I write as a Southerner about Southerners, with consequences of which others may judge. Concerning the design of this volume and the argument which it develops, I can give a more certain account.

Critical discussion of the characteristic relation of the Southern writer to his regional origins has now a history of more than thirty years. The implicit question buried within or just beneath the surface of this controversy is, "Why should the Southern writer be any different from the modern poet, novelist, or

dramatist born in Illinois or Dublin, St. Paul or the English Midlands?" Since the beginning of the Enlightenment the role of the man of letters has been that of the exile, at home only in the republic of letters or in the "faraway country" created for him by his imagination. The alienation of the artist is so much a commonplace that in most of the Western world it seems shocking and heretical to suggest that any other posture might be possible. Earlier conceptions of the role of the poet familiar in ancient times and in the critical theory of the medieval rhetoricians are now relegated to graduate seminars and, like Marxist criticism, held suspect because of their apparent indifference to that aesthetic absolute, the autonomy of the artist.

In greater or lesser degree, it is the contention of the following essays that the major figures in twentieth-century Southern literature have continued to apprehend, examine, and reflect the world from a post of observation situated within the known confines of an inherited, corporate experience: that they have done so even as, in some respects, they reacted against that experience. The most useful analogues are to certain Russians and Spaniards or to Irish writers like William Butler Yeats who never escaped to Paris or New York or London or any of the other places where artistic deracination flourishes naturally. Hence my choice of title, *Generations of the Faithful Heart*, drawn from Donald Davidson's "Lee in the Mountains." Remaining a member of the tribe, exhibiting a "faithful heart," has been for the Southern writer almost a precondition of his artistic performance. To go the other way, to close up the fountains of memory, is to run the risk of being left with nothing to say. Put another way, the continued existence of the regime, even if greatly altered, has been a "given," logically prior to and more important than a hypothetical inquiry into the nature of "the best possible city." Certainly this situation has begun to change and the premise no longer obtains for many young writers now appearing on the Southern scene. But it accounts for qualities which we have come to value highly in the literature of the Southern Renaissance, and it continues to influence certain of the finest writers of the contemporary South, though more often than not it impels them to sound the apocalyptic note.

The organization of the following essays divides the book into three parts: the first, which embodies my central proposition through an analogy to Roman literature and then illustrates the influence of the idea of corporate identity on four Southern novels—two by Eudora Welty, two by William Faulkner; the second, which treats at length the two figures among the modern Southern masters, Allen Tate and Donald Davidson, who were most consciously concerned with the relationship of the artist to his native culture and which also includes an essay on John Crowe Ransom dealing with his sense of the importance of inherited forms, both social and literary; and the last, which is made up of a series of critical examinations of the “sense of ending” as it appears in individual poems and fictions by Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Donald Davidson, Walker Percy, and Robert Penn Warren. The sequence has as its logic the predictable reaction to the obvious historical changes altering the modern ethos which these writers confronted. This conjunction of artist and time issued first in performance, then in debate, and finally in warning, once the customary forms for conduct and cultural expression would no longer suffice. Apocalypse is the natural theme for the traditionalist sensibility as it contemplates images of the collapse and disappearance of cultural coherence and community. However, as Warren’s “Dragon Country” reminds us, there was never any way to “fix” the world; and, so far as the power of man is concerned, neither is there any way to “ruin” it utterly.

Like the literature they examine, these essays are addressed in particular to Southerners and may therefore prove to be of some value to those outside the magic circle of blood and history and place *because* they honor the priorities they discuss.

Apart from the concluding essay on Robert Penn Warren’s “Dragon Country,” the other chapters in this book are, of course, republications of earlier work, though some of them have been considerably revised. Their unity is that of the author’s point of view, which time has altered very little.

For their help and assistance in the original editing and publication of these essays, I wish to thank Peyton Williams, Lewis Simpson, Thomas Landess, and Andrew Lytle. I also wish to

acknowledge the encouragement I received from the late William Wallace Davidson, longtime editor of the *Georgia Review*.

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To my wife, Marie, who helped in the various stages in the preparation and revision of this manuscript, I am perpetually indebted for her patience and judgment.

*Irving, Texas
October, 1981*

PART I

That Other Republic: *Romanitas* in Southern Literature

Southern literature, like that of most other distinctive cultures, grew up in response to circumstances. Only after-the-fact did it account for itself in the language of theory. Yet even though it had developed and accumulated to a considerable degree before anyone could ask what authority it claimed or what notion of social utility it presupposed, humane letters in the South did not emerge *ex nihilo*. From colonial times on through the nineteenth century, Southern writers drew upon a literary inheritance brought with them from the England of their origination: an inheritance filtered by the Augustans, John Dryden, and the Sons of Ben.¹ Behind their creative performance we can detect, through inference and analogy, an intelligible and internally coherent poetic.² Furthermore, even after the evolution of a conscious aesthetic by the poet/critics of the Southern Renaissance, that patrimony continued to exert an influence upon almost everything of a serious nature that Southerners wrote. My purpose is to indicate how the model of Roman letters, in its relation to the Roman cultural and political enterprise, stands behind and bears upon the originally implicit (and subsequently overt) literary theory of the South and therefore illuminates most of the region's literature composed before the First World War, to say

nothing of the great body of writing within (or in reaction to) that inheritance composed since 1918. For the Roman example has had a continuous and peculiar purchase upon the imagination of the Southern writer and is a key to his special (and un-American) relationship to his regional past, his sense of obligation to the *patria* and its good name.

The great bond between Roman and Southern literature is that both reflect the all-absorbing corporate spirit of the cultures for which they speak. The Southern writer, like his ancient counterpart, has almost always felt the pressure to be a *public man* and to perform a service in relation to that powerful sense of cultural identity. Poe notwithstanding, art as *gnosis*, as a private revelation facilitated by resignation or flight from society—romantic art—has never made sense in a Southern context, at least, if we agree with Lewis Simpson, not until the last few years.⁷ Southern and Roman letters look out toward the world, not inward into the mysteries of self. As Professor Duff observes, “Roman literature is full of [the] ineradicable [Roman] character It bore closely upon the interests of the society and the state [and spoke with a voice] inherited from simple rural times.” Its theme was conduct, not sensibility. And each of its important qualities, plus most of its identifiable kinds, can be traced back to this almost unconscious *Romanitas*. Duff concludes, “. . . the national character . . . inspires all Roman work.”⁸ Nothing could be further from the aestheticism and cultural ecumene of the Alexandrian Greeks—the antitype of all things Roman as presented in Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. Nor has the Southern writer, until the recent shift, ever really belonged to that “faraway country,” the Republic of Letters, the Promethean culture of mind which insists that first loyalties belong to it alone: at least not completely—not even during the great years of the Southern Renaissance.⁹

True enough, intelligence means some degree of independent judgment: mimesis is evaluation. But for the vatic spirit or the scop, that judgment does not start from scratch. The identity is given and non-negotiable. And decisions concerning what is best for it start from the premise that it must be protected and preserved, even if by

improvement. Its survival is the precondition and basis for all prospective reforms. Proposed alterations must be expected to honor that necessity. Otherwise they are to be put aside. The private intellect operates in negotiating its way within these parameters—there, and in the exercise of craft, in the skills of making. The self, even the creative self, requires a social support. The old conflict between sweetness and light, art and duty, resolve in the Horatian way. Literature cannot serve a purpose unless it be *dulce*, and could not aspire to the status of art without an audience, without being, in its burden, easily recognized and sanctioned by sensible men, without a claim of *utile*. Where this formula obtains, an academy of poets claiming their authority from sensibility, functioning as “unacknowledged legislators,” is inconceivable. The vatic role, defined by the Mantuan, is as a repository of memory. Those active in its performance are like a priesthood and a guild—but always, as citizens, pointed back toward a given world where things must be respected for what they are, not outward toward the stars.

It is a familiar paradox of earlier Southern education—an education that survived even into the time of my father's youth—that its products often “knew the literature of Rome far better than they knew that of England.”⁶ The Roman literature that Southerners read was, to be sure, selective: particularly Virgil, Horace, and the historians. But it was precisely the literature that Augustan Englishmen looked to as the purest expression of the Roman spirit,⁷ and the kind of literature which the Romans themselves expected to encourage judgment, probity, and *virtus*. The Revolution—the fact that the United States had become a republic, the first significant nation with such institutions and such a form of government since antiquity—of course intensified the purchase of the Roman literary performance on Anglo-Saxons this side of the Atlantic. And the desire for American books was similarly suited to the encouragement of a public virtue. For the Revolution had come when there was a general fear that such virtue was on the decline in Europe and seemed likely to fail even here. *Romanitas*, they realized, had under similar circumstances used

literature to fight a defensive action in the era of the civil wars and during the Golden Age. It had therefore left behind it instruments formed to serve a kindred purpose.

Biography was indubitably the most important of these: biography of and about Romans; biography of the sort usually associated with the name of Plutarch;⁸ and history (or heroic poems) embodying the corporate character in the record of its formation as a colony, its resistance to and removal of unworthy kings, the expansion of its frontiers in the subjection of hostile neighboring tribes and in civil and foreign wars. Narratives of travel, exploration, and early settlement where that composite personality discovered some of its direction and endured numerous tests were natural supporting materials, as were speeches from the men involved in these national adventures and moral essays (in the vein of Cicero) on conduct and common problems. Add to this list a social poetry, manuals for the practice of certain arts or useful skills, and reams of law, and it becomes complete.

A small number of specific Southern books will serve to illustrate the direct influence of the Roman poetic, and of the corporate spirit which it embodies, on the literature of our region. The sampling must, of course, be highly selective. But I shall attempt to draw upon representative works in each epoch in our literary history, concluding with final emphasis on how this inheritance has continued to influence in a special way the poetics rendered in the fiction and poetry of the Southern Renaissance itself.

To demonstrate the classical and essentially Roman spirit of colonial Southern literature is an easy task. And in the past twenty years, much of it has been performed.⁹ For one proof, we may look to the moral essays written under Latin pseudonyms in the early Southern press; to the prevalence of the classical elegy, the poem of natural consolation;¹⁰ or to the taste for comic "social" drama, verse satire, the survey of "natural history," and the practical study of political problems.¹¹ But from the beginning the most important artifacts were books of history and exploratory adventure. The *Agricola* of Tacitus stands behind the encomium upon Captain John Smith, entitled *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia* (Oxford, 1612)—and also Virgil. For, according to Professor Howard

Mumford Jones, "The word 'epic' throws a flood of light upon the structure of the work, which is in twelve books and which narrates the fortunes of two nations, opposed in peace and war. The figure of Aeneas-Smith, the transplanter to new shores of a wandering, yet divinely guided people, is dramatically contrasted with that of Powhatan, and both are sketched in grand and simple outline."¹² Sallust is present in accounts of Bacon's Rebellion; Pliny and Cicero in the "letters for publication" sent to England; and the moral spirit of Livy, fearful of the corruptions of misgovernment, wealth, and a gentle climate, in Hugh Jones and Robert Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia* (1722). But, as I noted earlier, the most interesting material comes after the birth of our Republic and the development in the South of the idea that the new nation's meaning and nature are best understood below the old surveyor's line.

When General Washington retired from military service, he ordered in bronze for his chimney piece, while planning a return to Mount Vernon, "A Groupe of Aeneas carrying his father out of Troy."¹³ This was a way of specifying what he and his generation believed they had done and a warning to the careless among future intellectual and cultural historians inclined to overemphasize the force of the rationalist Enlightenment in their political thought.¹⁴ The motif runs through the treatment of the Revolution given by biographers and historians writing in the early years of the Republic. To its hold on the Southern imagination, I shall return shortly. But it is from the literature of circumstantial problems, difficulties of the kind that we associate with keeping up the domestic establishment for which hearth and chimney are a centerpiece, that I must draw my next example of a Southern equivalent to Roman compositions. No steward of the old agrarian regime in Virginia, of the American version of republican virtue, speaks with greater authority than John Taylor of Caroline. His *Arator*, a treatise on farming and the place of agriculture in a healthy national life, recalls unmistakably Roman treatises on that art¹⁵ and particularly their archetype, the *De Agricultura* of Cato the Censor.

Taylor's book, like Cato's, is chiefly practical: on the maintenance of his fields and fences, the care of domestic animals,

the management of servants, and the selection of crops; on these and the other "offices" (some of a moral or religious nature) that belong to the planter's station. But his larger theme, like that of his Roman predecessor, is the preservation of a rural regime and of a republic which draws its disposition and direction from a normative rural past. And both insist that the kind of culture they depict is in full accord with constant components of human nature. The city, the commercial spirit, the complications of banking and credit are anathema to these industrious, homely aristocrats. Writes the grave Censor of the wisdom of the Fathers: "And when they would praise a worthy man their praise took this form: 'good husbandman, good farmer'; one so praised was thought to have received the greatest commendation."¹⁶ Taylor could not agree more, for the thematic core of his *Arator* is No. 59, "The Pleasures of Agriculture."¹⁷ He writes, "Poetry, in allowing more virtue to agriculture, than to any other profession, has abandoned her privilege of fiction, and yielded to the natural moral effect of the absence of temptation. The same fact is commemorated by religion, upon the occasion most solemn, within the scope of the human imagination."

Poetry written in the Old South, both before and after the War Between the States, also reflects the public aesthetic implicit in Roman literature. We should remember that the ode survived in Dixie until the latter part of the century, as did the other social forms of verse, even the Horatian "moral essay." In the latter category, we may consider William Grayson's "The Hireling and the Slave."¹⁸ The genre of this poem is a puzzle which only the Roman analogies will help us to solve. If the spirit of Cato and the historians is (with that of their Southern descendants or imitators) hard pastoral, emphasizing rural life as a discipline and nature as a test, then we have to identify the poetic ruralism of Virgil and Horace as something else. Yet their lyrics and satires are not set in the escapist Arcadia of the Greeks. Whether they write odes or meditations, essays, or epistles, their counsel and condemnation issue ordinarily from the cultivated garden of a middle situation which is both bountiful *and* modest, rich *and* temperate.¹⁹ And so do Grayson's. His target is the hypocritical benevolence of Exeter Hall, the intellectual center of abolitionist sentiment in England,

and the American spokesmen for the same sort of anti-communal, laissez-faire preachment that says, in a brief summary, "Let the white wage slave fend for himself, but pity the well-protected Negro of the South and condemn his paternalistic owner."²⁰ Grayson as satirist is a marvelous anachronism, writing verse portraits in heroic couplets in the "legislative style" of Dryden and Pope (as did they in the style of Horace) some eighty years after the manner had gone out of fashion in the remainder of the English-speaking world.²¹ From his garden at Beaufort he (and the South through him) could look at that world with a conscious confidence that the proverbial Southern backwardness which he bespoke had solid antecedents and an honest reason to be angry with the private speculations of private men: men who were confused by their ownership of anything because nothing owned a share in them. As the traditional *vir bonus* of this kind of poem, a voice functioning in a socially sanctioned role, Grayson is as sure in his performance, as calm and solid and easy (he was a figure of *gravitas* and a man of great learning) as Dryden in his *Religio Laici*; but only *because* he speaks out of a prescription, with more than personal authority, which was a rare thing in 1856.

After defeat in the war (which was for Southerners the Fall of their Republic) the social pressure on the imagination of the Southern writers resembled that felt by the Roman historians who were asked, under Caesar, to preserve the memory of better days and thus promote the Roman virtue rooted there. *Romanitas* combined easily with an elegiac thrust. And so it was with the Southern soldiers and apologists whose achievements are considered in the pages of Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.²² I mention here only Alexander H. Stephens' *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States, Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results, Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall*.²³ The book (in two volumes) is no simple narrative or apologia, but, like Cicero's *De Republica*, a complete theoretical discussion of American government, based on history and experience, on possibility developed in dialogue, with speakers representing recognizable components of the American composite. But there are many more mere essays, political meditations, memorial verses, biographies, and autobiographies that are also intelligible as responses to a theory of belle lettres that was

originally Roman. And annals! And public letters! And careful keeping of the "linen rolls," with families by the generation. Here I cannot delay to unfold all the connections that might be made. For a concluding word must be said about Southern writing after the region came to the crossing of the ways, of which Allen Tate wrote forty years ago.²⁴ For sometime after 1918, the question developed as to whether or not Southern literature would continue to speak with its old corporate voice. Its answer until very recently was *both yes and no*. And thus was equivocal, for reasons that we shall never understand apart from the vatic, Roman spirit of Southern writing before that date.

The dialectical, unincorporated temper of modern Southern letters, at least until we began to get confessional poetry, the novel as lyric, and the evocation of pure consciousness, has been greatly exaggerated. There are, to be sure, all sorts of exceptions. But many of the most famous Southern fictions and poems of this period, when they treat of unincorporated man, pure intellect, or sensibility, do so only to expose the breed. What they imply is that such creatures cannot be said to be truly alive. Mr. Tate has also advised us (in "The Southern Mode of the Imagination") that the creative impulse behind Southern writing put away a rhetorical world and moved to a dialectical situation when the Southern Renaissance began.²⁵ This formula is all too simple. Only after 1960 is that transition complete. And there is some real doubt that the Southern temper is even today simply dialectical—open to all possibilities, with nothing given. For one thing, it is a distinctive feature of the major Southern novels written during the great years of the Renaissance that an enveloping action contains and modifies their narrative core. The action proper of so many of these works is, in fact, the correction of private mania by the laws governing history and nature, as they inform some character of their stubborn reality. To live with and through such laws, to urge the prescription, the *mos majorum* in its highest sense, is often the challenge taken up by the protagonists or speakers in these works—or else the pathos of their inability to respond to that admonition. The motif of transplantation, of civil continuity, not innovation, in the West is in evidence throughout modern Southern literature: the

motif of the *Aeneid*, sounded in *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia*.²⁶ We think immediately of poems by Bishop, Davidson, and Tate; and of such novels as Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Great Meadow*—in which the *paterfamilias* sends his children, their families, and friends out from his house to cross the mountains into Kentucky with the rolling first lines of Virgil's invocation: "I sing of arms and the hero, who, fate driven, first came from the shores of Troy" ²⁷ Yet the theme of pious continuity is often there even in the least known productions of this imaginative explosion: in books like the unjustly neglected *And Tell of Time*, by the Texas novelist Laura Krey. There the Brazos bottom is the westernmost outpost of the South's New Troy. And the Darcys, the sons of Aeneas, facing the same old foes, are able to speak of that old Rome on the Tiber, "as if by kinship."²⁸

With this sense of incorporation with a larger European past, of the New World as a perfection—not a rejection—of the Old, it is no wonder that the central figure, the formal protagonist, in much Southern fiction is not an individual at all, but a family, its living members, ancestors, the hope of a posterity, and the principle which such families embody. Sartoris is the central character in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*; Fairchild, the protagonist in Miss Welty's *Delta Wedding*; Llewellyn at stake in Caroline Gordon's *Penhally*. Two families share the center of the stage in Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*. And the voice which we hear in the poetry of Davidson, as well as in much more Southern verse than we are sometimes led to believe, is certainly not that of a private man: not that of a poetic Icarus (James Joyce), flying upward. Yet Davidson is a poet, nonetheless: not excluded from the definition by his posture as *vates*. And there is nothing "unpoetic" about the "public" compositions of Ransom, Fletcher, Warren, and Tate—poems in which they speak out of something more than their private experience or private reason, often acknowledging the boundaries of an occasion or a question affecting their total culture.

Nor is there anything intellectually illegitimate in the gathering of Southern scholars, swapping "country" stories in the home of the Agrarian John Donald Wade, as reported in Louis Rubin's fine narrative of that event. The guest in Marshalville is a puzzled

NOTES

1. See a remark by Robert Bain on p. 79 of *Southern Literary Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
2. A notion of the purpose of literature, what it is for, and what it is not supposed to do. See Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Writer in the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), pp. 1-33, especially p. 17.
3. Lewis P. Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975).
4. J. Wright Duff, *A Literary History of Rome: From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), pp. 29-44. Also in the same vein are pp. 112-126 of R. H. Barrow's *The Romans* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949) and Frank O. Copley's *Latin Literature From the Beginnings to the Close of the Second Century A.D.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
5. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963); Lewis P. Simpson, *The Man of Letters in New England and the South: Essays on the Literary Vocation in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 229-255.
6. Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 15. Gummere says this of colonial Americans in general though, as he recognizes, it came to be peculiarly true of the South as the years passed.
7. James William Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 91-105.
8. *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair*, ed. by Trevor Colbourn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), p. 13 *et passim*; concerning the overwhelming impact of Plutarch on colonial Americans.
9. See, for instance, Richard Beale Davis, *Literature and Society in Early Virginia, 1608-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973) and J. A. Leo Lemay's *Men of Letters in Colonial Maryland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972). Of even greater importance is Richard Beale Davis's *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978, 3 vols.).
10. See the remark of Richard Beale Davis in *Southern Literary Study*, p. 97. The most interesting of these are John Cotton's contrapuntal epitaphs for Bacon.
11. William Byrd of Westover tells us of this taste in his "A Progress to the Mines." His "The History of the Dividing Line" reminds us of Pliny and Strabo—a mixture of natural history, geography, and travel literature—all defining the culture he comes from as well as the strange things he sees. William Bartram's *Travels* and John Lawson's *A New Voyage to Carolina*, if taken together, represent the same mixture, as does Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*—natural history, political description, and social theory tied down by the real.
12. *The Literature of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 28. Smith's *General History* owes more directly to Caesar's *Gallie Wars*.
13. Gummere, p. 13.
14. See my "A Teaching for Republicans: Roman History and the Nation's First Identity," *A Better Guide Than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution* (La Salle, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1979), pp. 3-27.
15. I mean also Varro's *Rerum Rusticarum* and Columella's *De Re Rustica*.
16. I cite p. 3 of *On Agriculture* by Marcus Porcius Cato, in the Loeb series, edited by William Davis Hooper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).
17. See my recent edition of *Arator*, published by Liberty Press (Indianapolis, 1978).
18. See pp. 21-45 of *The Hireling and the Slave, Chicora, and Other Poems* (Charleston: McCord and Company, 1856).

19. See Reuben A. Bower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 163-187.

20. Grayson's pro-slavery argument is a relative of that developed in George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters* (1857). Both derive from English Tory social thought.

21. On the design of the poem, see Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 336-341.

22. *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Post Bellum Thought* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1968), edited by George Core and M. E. Bradford. The documents Weaver examines are for the most part prose—in the vein of William Wirt's earlier life of Patrick Henry and (sometimes) of Parson Weems.

23. *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1868).

24. Allen Tate, *Collected Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. 28: "From the peculiarly historical consciousness of the Southern writer has come good work of a special order; but the focus of this consciousness is quite temporary. It has made possible the curious burst of intelligence that we get by the crossing of the ways, not unlike, on an infinitesimal scale, the outburst of poetic genius at the end of the sixteenth century when commercial England had already begun to crush feudal England." The same could be said of Roman literature with the end of the Republic.

25. *Collected Essays*, pp. 554-568. John Guilds puts the question concerning continuity between earlier and more recent Southern literature and observes that most scholars answer in the negative. See *Southern Literary Study*, p. 130. These scholars often echo Tate.

26. This theme is developed in Louise Cowan's "The Pietas of Southern Poetry," on pp. 95-114 of *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1961), edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs.

27. *The Great Meadow* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1930), pp. 120-121. Concerning Virgil's influence on this novel, see "New Troy in the Bluegrass: Vergilian Metaphor and *The Great Meadow*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXII (Winter, 1968-69), 39-46, by Jo Reinhard Smith.

28. *And Tell of Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), pp. 535, 117, 693, 704.

29. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Writer in the South*, pp. 82-90. The story should be read in its entirety.

30. *The Swimmers and Other Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 6.

Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*: The High Cost of Survival

The Unvanquished is not, aesthetically speaking, William Faulkner's finest novel. Indeed, it is sometimes mistakenly identified as a mere collection of loosely related stories rather than a novel. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged as the appropriate text for beginning the attempt to read through the Faulkner canon. It is also an excellent point of departure for a general discussion of a difference between much Southern fiction and that produced in the remainder of the Republic: a difference which points toward the deep-seated distinction between the traditional Southern view of personhood or individual responsibility and that frequently entertained in territories to the north and west.

The first problem the reader of *The Unvanquished* faces is presented by the book's title itself; and for the person trained to admire fiction according to the rule of Joyce and James, this problem is only compounded by reading the novel from start to finish. "Where," he will ask, "is the point of view character? Who speaks in this book? What consciousness is explored? And, if something has survived in the course of its 293 pages, why does not Faulkner gather the evidence of its durability into one figure on whom we might concentrate in recovering the shape and meaning of its vic-

tory?" The resolution of this difficulty is, I believe, to be found only when we have abandoned certain rather narrow conceptions of the possibilities of fiction and turned to analogues in this case more instructive than *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *The Ambassadors*. The most useful counterparts of *The Unvanquished* are other Southern fictions—books like Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*, Caroline Gordon's *Penhally*, and the novels of Ovid Williams Pierce—books that belong to the tradition identified by J. B. Hubbell as the "plantation novel." But we may look beyond the boundaries of the region's literature for a more elevated comparison. I refer to the history plays of Shakespeare as we have been led to interpret them by the late Sir Eustace Tillyard. In these majestic chronicles there is no single hero; rather, the protagonist is *res publica*, the Commonwealth, as sustained and undermined in varying degrees by the principal figures in a portion of British history. The hero is thus an idea, a notion of civilization acknowledged as at stake by the conduct of those who act within its ambit and under its measure. Such has been the case with the plantation novel since the time of John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*. And such is the case with *The Unvanquished*, where we are to understand the title as a plural and the hard-won survival of a civil order connected with the family name "Sartoris" as being the common enterprise of the sequence of protagonists who structure its unfolding.

I will return to the idea of corporate identity and what Richard Weaver has called "social bond individualism" in the course of my exposition. At this point it is enough to say that no Sartoris is inhibited in his or her self-expression by subsumption; that they *are*, exist completely, in their own uniqueness *only* as members of a particular family functioning in social stewardship within a particular community and place. One cannot say of Rosa Millard, the most impressive character in *The Unvanquished*, that she has been suppressed by her matriarchal duties. Nor of her sister-in-law, Virginia du Pre, that she suffers from anonymity in her assumption of Rosa's place at the novel's end. Even Bayard and Ringo, as mere boys, are all the more striking illustrations of human feeling and raw nerve in their unvoiced recognition that Rosa's murder by bushwhackers cannot go unpunished, that their family and all that

it has struggled to preserve cannot survive unless Grumby knows justice at their hands. In the dialectic of *The Unvanquished*, the alternative to selfhood through the social bond and the larger structures of patriarchal order is what Ringo refers to when he returns from town upon learning that his official connection to the Sartorises has been broken through Emancipation. Says the boy, "I done been abolished." It is against such a prospect that the whole clan (and by implication the whole political order which they epitomize) wages war to the knife.

Probably it is because *The Unvanquished* is "about" the War Between the States and views that conflict from the perspective of what it meant to those over whom that struggle was joined that most Faulkner critics have felt themselves uneasy in its presence. Or else because it renders with such telling force a teaching on community which is offensive both to the statist totalitarian and to the atomistic libertarian who occupy the conventional antipodes of contemporary cultural theory. Which are two ways of saying one thing. For despite his occasional recommendations for reform among his neighbors, Faulkner was a very old-fashioned man, a Southern sectionalist who, like his forefathers, found the proper basis for national feeling in his deep identification with Mississippi and the South. And the action of *The Unvanquished* carries with it overtones which come directly out of that intense regional connection—suggestions of a general interpretation of our great civil conflict, a theory of its meaning at variance with the received or Federalist reading. These implications are the unspoken scandal of *The Unvanquished*, and a major theme of this analysis.

In this novel the enveloping or "outer" action, the container of American history and its painful extrapolation within which Sartoris attempts to survive, is difficult to separate from the fable itself. But there is no doubt that for Faulkner the Clan Sartoris was a link between private and collective experience: in some sense, a trope for the South as a whole. In opposition is also an idea, that of Union "poured in from the top" and of impersonal liberty through enforcement of presocietal, abstract "rights." The dimensions of this antithesis we can only infer from the concrete evidence of speech, conduct, and authorial assignment of consequences to both. Yet it

is obvious that the novelist saw in the Federal invasion of his homeland a dramatic illustration of American millenarianism, gnostic secular Puritanism at its worst: *a juggernaut hidden within a noble noise*, breaking up the ancient forms of civilization as a link between persons, leaving in its wake only the ugly realities of social Darwinism. With the special tact of the poet, Faulkner renders this adversary in the image of fire. Under the aspect of conflagration, the spirit of total war, of ideology that allows its champions to ignore all prescriptions for limit, civility, and human feeling, enters Northern Mississippi. Colonel John Sartoris and his neighbors oppose it without expressing a counter ideology. But in a conflict of such violence there is always a danger that those in the posture of self-defense will adopt or be infected by the mania of their adversaries. The struggle of the various responsible representatives of Clan Sartoris is to fight the Yankees without becoming something like them, to put out the fires of Northern absolutism without falling victim to the internal fevers of a counter extremity: the dehumanization of being too much and too long at war. The kind of person young Bayard Sartoris has come to be when we see him in the novel's last chapter, "The Odor of Verbena," proves that they have not struggled in vain, that *through* him they triumphed.

But before looking closely at this final and most significant chapter, it is at this point proper to examine the novel's total structure and to recapitulate the tensions and the sequence of events resolved when Bayard, alone, goes up the stairs to face B. J. Redmond, the man who has shot down his father in the streets. *The Unvanquished* opens ("Ambuscade") with civil war about to come to Mississippi. On the plantation of John Sartoris there is rumor of a siege at Vicksburg and a restlessness among the family blacks which Bayard and his young Negro companion, Ringo, sense without being able to explain: an ominous prospect objectified by "clouds on the horizon." Finally the Yankees arrive and the boys take a shot at them from cover, fleeing thereafter to hide behind the skirts of the moral center of their little self-contained universe, Granny Rosa Millard, the mother-in-law of the widowed Colonel Sartoris and chatelaine of his domain. This first encounter has a comic denouement, as does a subsequent visit to and flight from the

place by the Colonel. Granny Millard is misled by these developments into thinking of the conflict as only a very dangerous version of male foolishness. The boys regale themselves in daydreams of chivalry. And the Colonel, while on furlough, confirms them all in the security of their delusions with his guile and gallant dash through a troop of Northern cavalry who attempt to capture him. And in his subsequent and single-handed victory (with the boys in tow) over another group of Yankees who surrender in the face of his charge without firing a shot. Meanwhile, life goes on as usual.

But John Sartoris's warnings of a more implacable conflict to come are fulfilled in the next Yankee descent upon the plantation (in "Retreat"). The result is ruin, fire and sword, and the dispersal of the Sartoris Negroes, some of whom join the slaves from the neighboring estates to wander the roads in search of Jubilee, a "bright shape" of freedom from the exactions of this life, waiting just beyond some imaginary "Jordan." The Sartorises attempt to recover their bearings by a retreat to Memphis, and manage instead to get their mules stolen. Then, in "Raid," drawn ever more deeply into the vortex of violence, they travel eastward, beyond the Alabama line, in search of kindred and a moment's repose. There they are caught in a human tide of Negroes who, governed by their faulty eschatology, are trying to get across a real river, in order to attach themselves to a Federal legion—a force itself struggling to avoid the chaotic consequences of the abolitionist rhetoric that called it into existence. The action begins to turn here, as Granny commences to fight back. Again, as she had when the boys had played the dangerous game of ambush, she finds a chivalrous Yankee officer who is ready to acknowledge her moral authority in the midst of war. Mules and silver and even slaves are returned to her keeping by this symbol of freedom without responsibility—returned through the signature on a piece of paper which authorizes the old woman to collect her own property. She uses it to collect a great deal more than that.

As we discover in "Riposte in Tertio," Granny, in her war on Mr. Lincoln, is not in the least political. And since she uses a piece of paper and forged duplicates thereof to gather consignment after consignment of mules, far beyond the number originally

authorized, it is also not very legal. Indeed, it is not quite theological; for, in an argumentative prayer to the Deity, she treats Him as the male sponsor of all such theory-ridden foolishness as war and agrees only to suffer the consequences of whatever bending of the Commandments her duty as matriarch has required. But not to repent of her observation of these necessities.

Yet Rosa Millard never really understands the conflict into which she has been drawn by the distresses of her neighbors, black and white. Operating from within the physical confines of her parish church and with the implicit blessing of a simple, fundamentalist preacher, she distributes mules and money to revive the subsistence economy of her community. As the war draws toward an end and the chaos becomes complete, she tries one time too often to pass one of her forged requisitions of reparation upon the minions of the Federal power. They empty her hidden mule lot. Thereafter, the war has drawn the blue-coated regulars out of her reach—or she has already fleeced all the Union officers within her orbit of influence. And thus, when attempting to gather something for the use of her soon-to-return son-in-law, she goes toward bushwhackers, proclaiming, "They won't hurt a woman." She dies not understanding that everything is politicized—and legalized and theologized—in a war to the knife. Her death is the measure of disorder in her world, of its desperate situation.

Bayard and Ringo feel responsible for Granny's death because, in the midst of the tide of freedmen sweeping Granny's buggy into the river at Hawkhurst (the destination of their trip to Alabama), they had become aware of the character of total war. And they knew that Granny had been disarmed by the personal gentility of certain Yankee officers. She was so rooted in her own world that the dislocations and cruelties of a struggle for survival were beyond her comprehension. To "confiscate" mules and to pray "Let it be upon my conscience" were only to participate as circumstances required in the violent masculine game. What was coming was an order in which dependents, however helpless, would not be "looked after" by real persons "who cared whether they lived or died," in which no one would find in long association and simple proximity the ground of responsibility. Hence, with the as-

sistance of Old Buck McCaslin, the boys run her murderer to ground and in the passion of their vengeance cut off his offending hand and peg his hide to the compress door. Thus is the honor of Sartoris (the idea *and* the family) vindicated, its capacity to sustain the devotion and loyalty of its retainers preserved. When Old Buck says, at the end of "Vendee," "Ain't I told you he is John Sartoris's boy?" the note of commendation is clearly Faulkner's own.

In the sixth chapter, "Skirmish at Sartoris," Colonel John has returned home from war. With the assistance of his cousin-and-wife-to-be and the loyal veterans from his regiment, he acts swiftly to remove from his sphere the remaining threat of the "fire without," the continued influence of *a priori* politics as an alchemical science and quasi religion in the form of the Reconstruction regime. Violence is still necessary. And with no more compunction than would be required in the killing of a wild beast, he shoots the two presiding carpetbaggers in Jefferson and carries the election, which eliminates such influences from local affairs. While he is alive, no one is going to be "abolished" in the sense implied by Ringo's aforementioned use of that word. Yet from this point onward, Colonel Sartoris is himself a source of disorder. For one thing, he has allowed his wife's cousin Drusilla to live as a man, a soldier in his regiment. And when the ladies of Yoknapatawpha County insist on their proper authority in correcting this indecorum, he marries the girl in the same spirit that he would take or issue an order in battle. In "An Odor of Verbena" we see him at the end of his labors. His house has been restored, his son educated, and a railroad built through his town. Yet, as his yeoman friend George Wyatt remarks, "He's had to kill too many folks, and that's bad for a man." Bayard describes his father as he last sees him as possessed by a "spurious forensic air," with "intolerant eyes which . . . had acquired that transparent film which the eyes of carnivorous animals have." At this point, the Colonel has just shot a simple farmer, one who had served under his command. And this he had done on reflex, after surprise, firing first and repenting thereafter. In bidding Bayard farewell, he echoes the boy's law professor at Oxford: " 'Cain's price' must be paid and the 'fever' purged from the land." War is finally over and the prudential com-

promises of social order are once again to be observed. He expects to facilitate that transition. He will invite his own death at Redmond's hand, with politics and business as only an excuse. But Bayard is to live on thereafter as a man of law and to operate as *The Sartoris* under the new dispensation, that of struggle within limits.

After Redmond has killed the unresisting Colonel in what appeared to be a gunfight, Bayard is summoned home to bury his father, satisfy honor, and carry out the instructions left to him in that final interview. Contrary to the standard interpretation of this final episode, his decision not to shoot Redmond is a vindication of all that has been achieved by his predecessors in his place. For "Sartoris" was never merely a dream of self-aggrandizement or of power for power's sake. Drusilla herself spells this out in a comparison of her husband with his megalomaniac neighbor, Thomas Sutpen: "But his dream is just Sutpen. John's is not. He is thinking of this whole country which he is trying to raise by its bootstraps, so that all the people in it, not just his kind nor his old regiment, but all the people, black and white, the women and children back in the hills who don't even own shoes—Don't you see?" This passage and related expressions of social theory, such as the long interpolation on the McCaslin patriarchy—a description of their community *with* slavery and *selective* manumission—are among the last written for the published version of *The Unvanquished*. They are its thematic core, reinforced by the action itself. In its essential character, "Sartoris" is an idea of peace prepared to defend itself in war. (Faulkner, as we should remember, said in an interview that the Bayard who refuses to shoot Redmond would nevertheless have killed anyone who had given an affront to his aunt.) And, though patriarchal, it is not merely paternalistic. Inequality is irreducible and requires stewardship on the part of those able to provide. Yet, as we can see from Granny's ledger of mules and money and from the McCaslins' liberation (in whole or in part) of such bondsmen as are able to care for themselves, patriarchy also means the encouragement in all men of such independence and self-reliance as is consonant with the survival of society as a whole. Granny does not reward the feckless use of her benefactions. Buck and Buddy free no helpless fieldhands. None in their care wander the roads in search of

"home-made Jordan." Their goal is interdependence, structured community, with a measure of dignity for all. Which gives them a role of importance in Faulkner's affectionate evocation of the old order of memory within which "he was born and raised."

With this much in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Bayard Sartoris refuses with his father's pistols the "fire of heaven that cast down Lucifer." The offer of these weapons comes from his cousin/stepmother, who appears before him in the aspect of a tall "candle," whose touch discharged a shock like electricity, and whose eyes glowed "feverish . . . brilliant and voracious." In this moment glorifying the privilege of vengeance, the continuation of violence, Drusilla represents the glamorous temptation to reject his father's adjuration and to live life as a demigod on horseback, whether or not circumstances call for that posture. To say nothing of the considerable (and related) temptation of her own charms. But Bayard Sartoris has thought through the experience of his people; and with their help (and that of Professor Wilkins) he eschews Promethean presumption and thus insures that they have not suffered or died in vain. His companion Ringo is like Drusilla, still caught by the mood of total war. And his father's friends expect a ritual slaying, as do even his mentor in the law and his wise and gentle aunt. Instead, Bayard risks death (or thinks he is risking death), and, to preserve honor, faces Redmond down in his office. The Colonel's old partner fires twice, to miss the boy, and then flees town. Drusilla also leaves, unable to live in the new and more muted world which Bayard's gesture has secured. Yet she and the rest of Yoknapatawpha accept it as befitting the young man's lineage. And she salutes his courage and rectitude with a sprig of verbena for his pillow.

Standing alone before his father's house and smelling the verbena, the young Sartoris articulates what it has all been about: "Maybe what Drusilla meant by his dream was not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget, which would even assume the corporeal shape of him whenever any of us, black or white, closed our eyes." We are not to take Bayard's name lightly. For he is called after that last knight of Christendom, the Chevalier de Bayard, *sans*

peur et sans reproche. There is no more Southern a novel than this.

Considered as a structure and as the rendering of a certain remembered social reality in peril and in agonized survival, *The Unvanquished* may thus be understood as both a genuine achievement in the art of fiction and as a key to some of the particularly unmodern qualities in the literature of the South. For the literature of our century has been more often than not absorbed with the interior drama of private consciousness in the hermetically sealed world of solipsism. It has been a coterie literature, unrelated to the traditional poetics which have justified the central place of letters in the culture of a civilized man. Faulkner himself, of course, sometimes renders consciousness and works through private men's experience to suggest the larger drama inside of which private men subsist. One need think only of *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. But it appears to me that he employs these strategies most frequently to expose the fragmentation of life which they manifest. Just as Bayard Sartoris and his Sartoris predecessors are the first of his experiments with a positive and (in his word) "enduring" figure as the formal center of a plot, so also do they mark his movement away from the modern aesthetic and toward a vatic or public role for his art. After 1938, few of his major characters owe much to Alfred Prufrock. We can say the same for the Llewellyns and Allards in Caroline Gordon's *Penhally* and *None Shall Look Back*, the Fairchilds of Shellmound in Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and the characters or voices speaking in so much other Southern poetry and fiction during the Renaissance. Close readers of the *The Unvanquished* have been puzzled by its design, by its movement from Granny to the Colonel; to Bayard and Ringo; to the Colonel again, plus Drusilla; and then finally to Bayard. And they have also puzzled over Faulkner's prepublication interpolations of communal social theory. I have tried here to suggest what can be made of this evidence if we assume a composite protagonist and concentrate on the imagery of the "fire without" and the "fever within."

Yet criticism is successful only if it encourages a return to its referent, to the thing fearfully and wonderfully made. Each act of reading Faulkner as I believe he expected to be read is for

Southerners also an act of piety. Even (or especially) when what he says seems a bit severe. For we still understand that no one is anyone unless he belongs, and that service is the price of belonging. And when repeatedly threatened in our very existence as a people by contrary notions of human identity, we are tempted to respond with what Yeats called "the terrible beauty" of anger enacted—always the other side of love. To make this mistake is to forget how much is at stake, and how our literary inheritance may assist us in keeping in context the part we are to play. In concluding, let us think for a moment of two other images close to the thematic core of this fiction: the elegant stained-glass window panes, brought all the way from South Carolina to decorate the western windows of John Sartoris's rebuilt home, and the hurtling locomotive that dashed across an almost occupied South, trumpeting defiance just before the Yankees destroyed the tracks that ran from Memphis to Western Alabama. The latter seems to epitomize the mood embodied by Clan Sartoris when under fire: the former, the excellence in whose behalf so much defiance was declared. These images belong to a bygone world. But as Faulkner tells us, only the props change. The struggle is always the same.¹

NOTE

1. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938). My reading is indebted to Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 75-99 and 382-385. I also found Michael Millgate's *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 165-170, very useful.

Fairchild as Composite Protagonist in Miss Welty's *Delta Wedding*

Like Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back*, William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, and many of the earlier Southern novels with a plantation setting, Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* embodies certain formal characteristics which make of its action and design a puzzle to the modern reader—the reader conditioned by the tradition of James and Joyce to expect of serious fiction a lyric rendering of a particular sensibility.¹ For in *Delta Wedding* we have no single hero or heroine. Instead, the protagonist of the novel is the family Fairchild, to whom all of its characters relate in one fashion or another. And the action is the survival of that family as a composite entity which protects and sustains the distinctive and internal lives of its component parts. Not much really happens in *Delta Wedding*: a daughter of the house is married; one of the Fairchild brothers, George, is separated from and then reunited with his wife; a motherless cousin, Laura McRaven, is absorbed and reassured within the magic circle of kinship. Add to this a measure of family recollection, a plethora of frantic activity, and innumerable private but unspoken reactions to the common life of Fairchild in the days before and after the seventeen year old Dabney's union with Troy Flavin, the plantation overseer, and you have the bare

pattern of the plot. No one tells this story, and also everyone, with only a little help from the author. Yet such reduction is misleading and draws our attention away from the characteristics of the book which give it order: qualities which fly in the face of ordinarily cherished assumptions about the value and primacy of the *a priori* self, a postulate of most modern social thought. For though particular Faichilds speak or are "overheard" while thinking throughout *Delta Wedding*, this individuality rests always upon the security that comes of being Fairchild—or upon a desire to share in that security. Shelley, the oldest daughter, who is about to leave for Europe, writes in her diary, "... all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside" (p. 84). Elsewhere, her Uncle George's wife, the restless and possessive Robbie, makes reference to the "Fairchild masks" (p. 146). In this posture or persona, there is more of *Gemeinschaft* than of the *Gesellschaft* of atomistic individualism.² Which suggests that there may be a direct and causal link between the anachronism of Southern social thought and this particular rendering of its assumptions in the dynamic matrix of Miss Welty's art.

Except for certain noisy and obstreperous early reviews, responses in the vein of reflexive liberalism, previous criticism of this novel has avoided any consideration of such a link.³ The orthodox view of the book, perhaps designed to protect it from guilt by association, argues that it is not about the South. Our attention is rightly directed to elements of pastoral and comedy and to the author's wistful and whimsical distance from her subject matter. It is true that *Delta Wedding* does draw us into the country, there to reconnect us with the primordial things. Furthermore, all events in the story do resolve upon an act of matrimony, when all elements of diffusion receive a partial, temporary resolution. Which for the elegiac vision is the only kind of resolution we can expect. For even Fairchild must accommodate itself to the rhythms of mutability through the rituals of birth and death and marriage. But that is precisely to my point. For it is through Fairchild, the patriarchal or matriarchal family, that all these rituals signify. And in this respect Fairchild is not only a family, but *the* family. And that is another

name for the South, in so far as " . . . it is the family which best describes the nature of its society," the family which is "*the institution of Southern life.*"⁴

The easiest way to mark the effects of the composite or corporate identity upon the individual Fairchilds is to measure the distance between what we are shown or told of their private thoughts and what they do and say when in company. On the one hand, a dozen small rebellions seem to be in progress; on the other, they labor constantly to reassert the familial bonds and at the least provocation draw upon that prescription or reservoir of mutually pledged love and devotion for emotional support. As one of them says, "The outside did not change but the inside did; an iridescent life was busy within and under each likeness" (p. 15). Dabney believes at times that she is betraying Fairchild in "marrying down." Shelley rehearses her separateness in her diary. Laura once imagines burning down Shellmound, the most important of the three great houses on the plantation. Ellen, the mistress of that house, thinks constantly about the pressures that may pull it apart. But by marrying, Dabney brings to the corporate enterprise a reinforcement of the masculine principle, a corrective for one of its deficiencies. Shelley, when her Aunt Robbie returns from her temporary desertion of Uncle George, joins with her aunts in berating the hapless girl for her failure in group loyalty. In her turn, Laura is delighted to be included in the wedding. And Ellen is the strongest force for cohesion of all of these, though a Fairchild only by marriage and close study.

The novelist appears to have included these numerous evidences of private sensibility only to demonstrate how well they are contained. As Laura observes, "When people were at Shellmound it was as if they had never been anywhere else" (p. 134). For the Fairchilds live almost outside of time, or rather in a cosmic order of time, bound only by the seasons, the stars, and the nearby Yazoo, the "river of death." Through the alchemy of memory their history has become archetypal: "But boys and men, girls and ladies all, the old and the young of the Delta kin—even the dead and the living, . . . —were alike—no gap opened between them" (p. 14).⁵ That memory is reinforced by the physical particulars of their

setting: the numerous portraits, paintings, diaries, old books, recipes; the three old houses themselves and their accoutrements; the surrounding ambiance of fields, forest, and town with the inevitable Southern communal cemetery; and, finally, the catalogue of Fairchild names with the stories that connect them one to another. All of it signifying "Honor, honor, honor," in the moral lexicon of the matriarchs (p. 120). Robbie, the always complaining outsider, accounts for their purchase in objecting to her husband's risking his life for his retarded niece, Maureen:

Sometimes she thought when he was so far out of reach, so far away in his mind, that she could blame everything on some old story For he evidently felt that old stories, family stories, Mississippi stories, were the same as very holy or very passionate, if stories could be those things. He looked out at the world, at her, sometimes, with that essence of the remote, proud, over-innocent Fairchild look that she suspected, as if an old story had taken hold of him—entered his flesh. And she did not know the story (p. 191).

But before the novel is finished, she is learning rapidly that she had married more than George when she married a Fairchild (p. 141) and that to live in their midst she must remember to keep her "kin-folks and their tragedies straight" (p. 45).

Robbie's problem, and also Laura's and Shelley's and even Dabney's, is that they in the moments of their meditation stand self-consciously outside the boundaries of Fairchild. Something about their lives has left them isolated, "beyond the closest intimacy" which makes the Fairchilds almost anonymous to one another (p. 188). The figure representing their situation, which appears throughout *Delta Wedding* and functions there as a poetic governing metaphor, is the motif of the ring or circle belonging to the ancient children's game and the song with which it is played. In the course of the book most of the Fairchilds "go in and out the window." As the precocious Laura says:

It was funny how sometimes you wanted to be in a circle and then you wanted out of it in a rush. Sometimes the circle was for you, sometimes against you, if you were It. Sometimes in the circle you longed for the lone outsider to come in—sometimes you couldn't wait to close her out. It was never a good circle unless you were in it, catching hands, and knowing the song. A circle was ugly without you (p. 73).

The situations of individual members of the family seem at times to fit the verses of the song. Dabney did indeed "go forth and choose a lover." "I kneel because I love you" belongs to Robbie's humiliating walk from the town of Fairchild to Shellmound and to the indignity she faces there. With Shelley, it is "one kiss before I leave you." "I measure my love to show you" could refer to George and his enactment of Fairchild chivalry on the trestle, or to Ellen and Battle when they invite Laura to make her home with them at Shellmound, or even to Troy, in his tireless labors and in risking his life.

But it is Ellen who proves herself to be the real master of the entire ritual, having come as an outsider from Virginia and passed through all the stages of aloneness, of union, and of re-separation; for she most nearly understands the place of each member of her family in the never-ending sequences of openings and closings in the ring. And the game of "in and out the window" goes something like the game of life: we imitate in order to belong.⁶ Always we are finding ourselves set apart from the social bonds by the urgent demands of selfhood; always we must weave our way under and around the compass of our world, so that our bearings are restored when we are ready to declare again the love that makes us one with it. Usually we do this in concert with some one particular person who is the instrument of our reintegration. But that person must also do it for himself. And so the cycle continues as long as life goes on. But by continuing to play the game that is Fairchild, all members may sue for readmission and rejoin the hand-holding circle of corporate affection, the self-contained universe where they truly exist. We can look once again to the choric Aunt Shannon for a touchstone in understanding the entire process. For by her, "... the members of the family were always looked on with that general tenderness and love out of which the single personality does not come bolting and clamorous, but, just as easily emerges gently, like a star when it is time, into the sky and by simply emerging drifts back into the general view and belongs to the multitudinous heavens" (p. 63).

It is with this image of the separate star that Miss Welty organizes her conclusion for *Delta Wedding*. Dabney and Troy have

returned from their brief honeymoon in New Orleans. Robbie and George seem well reconciled and are planning to come back to the Delta, where George will resume possession of the Grove and try some planting of his own. Laura has been officially invited to take up residence at Shellmound. And together the Fairchilds go out on a picnic, remaining at Marmion after it is dark to enjoy the first cool night and contemplate the beauty of the Milky Way. They rest in a circle of speech and touch and other affectionate gestures. The problems of the previous eight days are temporarily resolved. And though as Robbie recognizes, "Things almost never happened, almost never could be, for one time only . . ." (p. 244), the knowledge of how to deal with them should keep the circle intact. At that moment, once their talking is done, a falling star sweeps across the sky, and then another, reminding the Fairchilds of what it means not to be in motion, aflame, and alone—however attractive the temptation may sometimes be to emulate the star.

Like Pinchy, the young Negro girl whose religious crisis has served as part of the backdrop for the wedding, the Fairchilds have "come through" (p. 191). They survive, as the Clan Sartoris survives in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*. As it is manifest in the entire book, the corporate voice has been heeded. And if the South as a regime is best objectified in the image of a family, then *Delta Wedding* reports something about the region in telling us that Fairchild is a game that no one can finally win and no one refuse to play. But such elegiac wisdom is certainly older than any aspect or component of our new world culture. Eudora Welty has made it her subject in most of her work. George Fairchild is a counterpart to Jack Renfro in *Losing Battles*, and Robbie to Gloria, Jack's wife. The consequences of mismarriage are the focus of *The Optimist's Daughter* and are treated comically in *The Ponder Heart*. Which is to say nothing of the "dangerous" husband in *The Robber Bridegroom*. But the treatment of the theme of marriage belongs to the generic dimensions of pastoral comedy, not to irony or fairy tale or the absurd. And Fairchild as family is treated seriously—as imperfect and subject to change but, in the terms of the novel, a non-negotiable given. Therefore, romantic symbols like the falling star and the trapped bird (to which Robbie is compared when she lets in the

female thrush at Shellmound on her return to George) have only a contrapuntal role in its metaphoric system. Ellen sums up this antiromantic sentiment when in the novel's climactic moment she instructs her troubled sister-in-law: "There is a fight *in* us, already, I believe—in people on this earth, not between us . . ." (p. 163). Robbie must be prepared to look every day at the portrait of the founding matriarch, Mary Shannon. And to have Mary Shannon look back at her (p. 244). For how else shall the "country garden" of the old song be made to grow and to nourish them all, so that like George they may affirm the whole of life (pp. 37, 213) and cherish it moment by moment, within the magic of the circle, where, as Laura tells us, things are always "good."

NOTES

1. *Delta Wedding* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946). I have included citations from the novel within the text of these remarks.

2. The distinction made between corporate and individualistic cultures in European sociology often employs these terms. Ferdinand Tönnies is their probable originator. See Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

3. An example of the liberal criticism is Diana Trilling's "Fiction in Review," *Nation*, 162 (11 May 1946), 578. She is not altogether incorrect in her view of the larger implications of *Delta Wedding*, though mistaken in insisting that the book contains a direct political teaching.

The argument that the novel is not "about the South" is well represented in John Edward Hardy's *Man in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 175-93; in Alfred Appel, Jr.'s *A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), pp. 199-204; and in Ruth M. Vande Kieft's *Eudora Welty* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1962), pp. 93-110.

The worst sort of confusion about Welty's intention, however, is to be found in Richard Gray's *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 174-84. Gray imagines criticism of the role of family ties in this fiction where none is intended and none appears.

4. Andrew Lytle, "Foreword," *A Novel, a Novella and Four Stories* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), pp. xx, xvii.

5. We are reminded of Burke's description of the traditional society as the incorporation of "the dead, the living and the yet unborn," though the only history that the Fairchilds remember is Fairchild history—or their part in larger events, like the settlement of the Delta and the War Between the States.

6. Shelley grasps the function of role playing and imitation in a prescriptive culture when it occurs to her that Troy acts in conscious emulation of her father, Battle Fairchild, and that perhaps he too learned how to play his part through imitation of some earlier paragon, as George had learned from Denis (p. 196).

A useful antitype of this self-effacement (and counterpoint to *Delta Wedding* in its treatment of the dangers of private sensibility) is the portrait of George Posey in Allen Tate's *The Fathers* (1938). Particularly to my point is the account of Posey's inability to share in the rituals of his mother-in-law's funeral.

References to the circle, ring and the children's game appear throughout the novel. Some are muted, as in the window-motif connected with Laura, pp. 3-5; in Shelley's warning of rejection for the returning Robbie, p. 51; and in Dabney's apostrophe to night: "Draw me in, she whispered, draw me in—open the window like my window" (p. 90). On the other hand, some are completely overt. India sings a part of the song when she tells her version of the rescue of Maureen (p. 59). Others occupy a point between these extremes: Shelley, p. 216; Robbie, p. 167; the indented circle of family Negroes at Dabney's wedding, on p. 211—a heart-shaped ring with the black matriarch Parthenia at its center.

What Grandfather Said: The Social Testimony of Faulkner's *The Reivers*

It is now fashionable to maintain that the artistic performance of William Faulkner after the publication of *Go Down, Moses* (1942), or following the Nobel Prize for Literature (1950), fell off sharply.¹ According to this theory the later Faulkner was too preoccupied with the besetting problems of his time and too heavily burdened by his vatic duty to produce more of that quality of fiction which had earned his great reputation. Certainly there is evidence to support these conclusions: the frequency of Faulkner's public appearances after 1950, the uneven quality of *Intruder in the Dust*, the rambling loquacity of *The Town* and *The Mansion*, and the great dead spot of *A Fable*. But it is also no difficult matter to raise objections to so broad a generalization. For there is excellent material even in those works which Faulkner wrote in the midst of his fame. And there is also, at the end, *The Reivers*.² In that valedictory performance the admonitory inclinations of Faulkner the patriarch and public figure found for their expression a formal vehicle suited perfectly to the necessities of his craft. And the results were, I believe, a masterpiece.

In *The Reivers* Faulkner speaks almost *in propria persona*. But by the first two words in the novel that speaking is made dramatic and

the tale which follows converted into a conversation with well-defined implicit auditors and the built-in verisimilitude which proceeds from the established relationship of speaker to listeners. For what grandfather says is *for* grandchildren and carries with it by implication all of the social assumptions which ordinarily dictate the passage of inherited wisdom *qua* story down through the sequence of generations in a family self-conscious of its mission in the world. Of course, the fact that the book begins with "GRANDFATHER SAID" makes us as readers separate from a past tense and exterior spectacle; and it also secures for Faulkner, to whose grandchildren the novel is dedicated, an occasion for a whole series of minor ironies, mock-heroic juxtapositions of lofty gabble with a genial and self-effacing persona. And thus he is protected from the "heresy" of the first person and the natural resistance of the modern reader to that authorial stance. For Lucius Priest as grandfather is thus presented as amused with himself and at the same time is provided with a plausible reason for offering the essentially comic matter of his adventures as a boy of eleven. Therefore, I insist that *The Reivers* is both conduct book in the technical sense of that term and also lyric—even more peculiarly, a lyric which follows the structural pattern of high comedy.³ To explain I will turn directly to the design of the book.

The Reivers is a novel in three parts, set in motion by an overture or prologue which frames its central narrative and announces its motifs. Lucius Priest, the narrator, is the protagonist, and the time is less than a week of his early adolescence. The scene is Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner's mythical Southern microcosm, *circa* 1905. And the action can be best described as maturation accomplished with unseemly haste. Therefore the fall and redemption of young Lucius Priest partake of the nature of the *Bildungsroman*. But before Lucius commences in his experience with the rites of passage, before he encounters those Bunyanesque abstractions of Virtue and Non-virtue as they operate beyond the protective umbrella of home and family, his nemesis, companion, mentor in wickedness, and, finally, his principal charge in early manhood must be introduced. Boon Hogganbeck is a familiar figure to those acquainted with the total Faulkner canon. In the initial chapter of

The Reivers (but probably the last chapter of the novel to be composed), Hogganbeck is about forty years of age, employed by Maury Priest (the father of the narrator) and by Maury's father (Boss Priest) as the night foreman of the small-town North Mississippi livery stable. Also involved in this opening episode are three Jefferson Negroes, Ludus, John Powell, and Son Thomas. And off at the periphery of this prologue are the black girlfriend of Ludus and two bootleggers—one, Uncle Cal Bookwright, who makes the best moonshine available, and another less responsible practitioner of the trade whose staple is rotgut and whose patrons are dark. The members of this company, together (and particularly Boon), define the threat to which Lucius is soon to succumb.

All of the themes of *The Reivers*, as well as the tension whose unfolding is the occasion for their exploration, are adumbrated in its beginning (pp. 1-17). The chapter introduces setting, characters, and subject, and predicates at the same time that what follows must be comic and that the old dependable fires of shame and remorse are, in preparation for that activity, being kindled for employment within an even larger compass. Chapter I is not directly connected to the main narrative and Lucius is only a spectator there. But clearly his fall is anticipated by Boon's and is linked to it as is a finished product to its miniature prototype. Furthermore, these pages link the entire novel to the remainder of the Yoknapatawpha Cycle in certain noteworthy respects. And though Lucius's role in this overture is, as I said, only that of informed spectator, the plainness of its burden leaves him with no excuse for not learning from the interlude better than what he later does with Ned, Boon, and his grandfather's car. That Lucius *does not* is proof that he is no victim of subtle tempters once he comes to the test and is found wanting.

The formal occasions of action in Chapter I are simple indeed; Ludus has a girl in the country, and his employer has wagons and mules which he may use to reach her. Boon is in charge of the mules and wagons and indifferent to Ludus's "nightwork." But he would like a little whiskey and is willing to believe the young black's lie about soaking a wagon wheel if his money is delivered to Uncle Cal and the whiskey put into his hands. Boon here is the

overgrown child that we learn to expect from *Go Down, Moses*. And only John Powell of the responsible help is present to restrain Ludus and Boon from their bargain. But Powell in his turn is compromised by another kind of "bargain" because everyone in the stable knows he carries a gun, a practice which is against the official rules of the establishment and the community. Ludus, however, does not have sufficient time to visit his girl and to pick up Boon's whiskey from the Bookwright still. Too much distance is involved. Therefore, he brings Boon only a cheap equivalent of his price for silence. And Boon tells Mr. Ballott, his immediate superior and the day foreman, the entire story so as to get Ludus fired; in fact, he insists that Ludus be fired, chiefly because he is angry with the disappointing consequences of his own complicity.

This malice in turn angers the black drayman, who was unwilling to forfeit what he foreknew would be the wages of his "sin" if and when those nocturnal wanderings were exposed: position, salary (plus the two dollars owed Boon), and (most irritating) transportation. He has acquired a sense of personal grievance instead of an awareness of the inevitability of retribution. And like the prototypes of all soured bargainers in Faulkner, the victims of Flem Snopes's swindle in "Spotted Horses," Ludus murmurs—calls Boon a name reflecting on his intelligence and his ancestry, about both of which we know Boon to be sensitive, and with reason: even goes to the trouble to do this in such a way as to insure that his words are widely reported.⁴ Boon is predictably affronted, goes for Maury Priest's revolver, with no luck there, and then for John Powell's. After pursuing Ludus into the town square, he then proceeds, in his best Hogganbeck fashion, to shoot up everything in sight: everything, that is, except his high-stepping target. From that moment several additional "unrighteous" folk come to be involved in this ever-worsening display of the varieties of Non-virtue.

As noted above, John Powell, because of his pistol, was subject to intimidation by Ludus—and indignity from Boon. He knew of Ludus's escapade and tacitly sanctioned it, under unspoken threat of "exposure" (it would abrogate his agreement with Mr. Priest if Maury were made officially aware of the presence of a private pistol), even as he saw the loaded rig (stores, peppermint, and all)

parked near the Priest establishment. Powell had warned the younger Negro against dealing too lightly with Boon and had anticipated trouble. When it came, he spoke up—restrained his own impulse to seek redress for the injury Boon had done him in stealing his gun, checked himself because he owes a courtesy to his friend/employer; and, out of the very sense of honor that made him carry a snub-nosed revolver he never intended to use, John confessed himself a party to the entire outbreak, and set out to quell it. The culpability of Lucius's father (in leaving Boon, pistol, and potential provokers together) is likewise quickly acknowledged. His cost is not just embarrassment but also interruption of business and no little money. He "stands it" as well as the hostler—recovering Boon, pistol, a slightly wounded Negro girl (squealing loudly), and a deputy all together before Judge Stevens for the direct patriarchal justice necessary to a healthy community: payment (by Priest) of the cost of damages (to the girl and to Ike McCaslin, whose storefront window has been broken), and a peace bond (requested and paid for by Priest to arrest the spread of Non-virtue and to see to it that its propagators savor its fruits). The entire episode is not lost upon young Lucius; indeed, the pattern in which the day's events return to him indicates that, even as an untested boy, he saw in them the deceptiveness and allure of "short-cutting"—the speed and ease with which it spreads—and its costs.

That pattern, or even a chronological rearrangement of it, cries out to any intelligent observer the truism (ever new to the uninitiated) that the only way to stop the spread and cut the costs is to face the consequences as soon as possible. But neither understanding nor careful instruction in responsibility given him from early childhood by his family (pp. 3-4) or the vigorously underscored refusal by Maury Priest to allow Boon, Ludus, or himself to circumvent the punishment they are due prevents the boy from ignoring the forewarning and embracing his own species of Non-virtue within a few days—as soon as the main narrative of the novel begins. The episode of Boon and Ludus, to repeat once more, defines young Lucius as a willing sinner and establishes the context in which his "education" occurs.

Apart from a careful pacing and unobtrusive maintenance of

an order of time (unusual in Faulkner), rich characterization (not complex, but complete even when two-dimensional, as far as comedy allows), and an organically unified, well articulated plot, the structure of *The Reivers* is little reinforced by the poetic or dramatic qualities which go into the composition of most modern fiction, including Faulkner's. Here the trademark of symbolic naturalism, the texture of metaphor, is thin, both in the speech of the principals and in the portraiture, mulling, and reminiscence of their recaller. The diction is suited only to broad strokes, not to Jamesian etching and Elizabethan amplitude, the other options of the genre. And the presence of normative terms such as the endlessly repeated "Virtue" and "Non-virtue," though comic in effect, spells out the poles of the tension animating the entire fable in the barest manner imaginable. Yet all that there is in the novel belongs to and with the persona of the sixty-seven-year-old grandfather and to the implicit setting in which he speaks, the child and heir before him awaiting "instruction" on what to expect and how to prepare to fill the place he will soon inherit.

The elder Priest is the familiar Faulknerian "over-voice," modified by the passage of years and the changed relationship to his audience that lapse had brought upon the novelist, but serving Faulkner's ends, *sans* any fracturing of aesthetic illusion or necessity of intrusion, better than any adopted by him before. Boss Priest is close enough to Faulkner for Faulkner not to be tempted, even for a moment, to push him aside: both an independent creation, part of the world of Yoknapatawpha, and the sort of "safety valve" the Mississippian seemed to need more and more as he grew older. He can say, and with good hope of purchase on the reader's attention because of the care with which the scene of transmission is set up and its built-in, human appeal, whatever Faulkner wishes: say it, even while interrupting the narrative, without doing any damage to the novel's integrity of design. For he speaks from authority, after years of sifting and analysis (pp. 50-51) on his earlier self (the device perhaps echoing Conrad); moreover, he has, as a loving grandfather helping his grandchildren, every reason to speak, digress, and even moralize: every reason as an old man remembering his youth to be both open and amused. A settled mind can be

very serene in dealing with things terrible to the young, has no problem with haste, and no fear of digression—especially if it is enjoying the purposeful recreation of what was loved and left behind.

Hence Priest has no necessity of an aggressive posture. In him Faulkner projects a rhetorically unexceptionable combination. The persona, the convention of a recollective narrator established on page one, converts the entire book into a relaxed dramatic monologue (prefaced by another, shorter monologue and containing a *Bildungsroman*—discovery encapsulated by judgment) and is its chief formal property. The persona presents his youthful self in motion while controlling our understanding of that self, violating neither it nor us; it gives the work a finality rare in early Faulkner, and yet preserves it from classification as mere parable. Or, to put matters otherwise, the unity of *The Reivers* is the unity of the narrator, the wisdom of Lucius Priest which it purports to make available to his (and our) progeny. It is the wisdom of a class and kind and Faulkner's tribute to both. Lucius's presence gives the novel a thematic complexity, makes it both an exemplum on the necessity of "endurance" (Faulkner's *most inclusive* normative term), a demonstration of grandfatherly concern, and an example of what Paul Fussell calls "elegiac action": an admonition to reform and return disguised as a call to remember and lament.

With the formal implications of Faulkner's narrative posture and the function of his opening chapter thus specified, it is now possible to confront directly the theft of the novel's title (for "reivers" is Scots for thieves)—the action of car theft and hilarious Tennessee aftermath of that "crime." As I stated earlier, the central action of *The Reivers* is in three parts; and though the pattern of this action follows the archetype of comedy in moving from folly to involvement in Saturnalia (the reversal that is the consequence of folly) and thence to hasty and embarrassed extrication, it is not so uncomplicated as has sometimes been imagined. For this simple design depends in great measure upon some old and familiar symbolic "presences" or counters for resonance and purchase: specifically, machines, women, and horses. They keep the plot in motion as they push, pull, and compel Lucius, his two fellow thieves, and all of their connection onward into complication, dis-

tress, and illumination; and their meaning *as a sequence* is assuredly part of what they together discover. Nowhere else is Faulkner more skillful and less obtrusive in the combination and absorption of tropes into the flow of his narrative. And nowhere does he employ with greater success the motif of the young man's initiation into the duties of his station—nowhere, even though this theme is the preoccupation of so many of his novels. For Faulkner never allows us to forget that Grandfather's Winton Flyer is, by inference, all of the temptations which a man must face, that use or abuse of women is a summary evocation of the fruits of surrender to such temptation, and that the figure of the knight mounted is an incarnation of the idea of the gentleman, Western civilization's traditional answer to the problems introduced by the connection of the two preceding metaphors.

Chapters II, III, IV, and part of V (pp. 18-95) make up the first movement of *The Reivers*. Their subject is man and the primitive automobile, a most dangerous passion (the former for the latter). Women replace the Flyer in the remainder of Chapters V and VI (pp. 95-136). Women and horses together complicate matters throughout subsequent chapters, the few pages of denouement perhaps excepted (pp. 299-305). Women and cars are the occasion of the Memphis "underworld descent" to Lucius and Boon, horses and women the occasion *and* cause of their reëmergence at Parsham and in Jefferson. And, of course, we would expect women to play a part in any action where what the connoisseurs of the archetype call the myths of "the initiation journey" and "the visit of the underworld" are combined. They are altogether an evocative combination indeed—motion, speed, escape, adventure, sex, chivalry, and two laps for the sardines. But to explain what I mean I must glance at a few of the specific details of the plot of *The Reivers*.

Boss Priest owns one of the first automobiles in Jefferson. It is in the keeping of Boon, and it is one of the "interests" which are to bring him to a minor transformation of his own. And Boon, as we have said, is the biggest part of the envelope of circumstance which presses Lucius beyond the shelter of his pre-moral condition as a child and (in the idiom of the novel) into "accountability." Boon

chauffeurs and washes the beautiful Flyer; but his desire is to have full and free use of it, at least for a time. That, and the temporary use of a certain girl in Miss Reba's establishment on Catalpa Street in Memphis. The two are connected from the first, as are sex and the machine throughout Faulkner's work. But before this conjunction can be completed, coincidences other than Boon's disposition and his friendship with young Lucius must assemble: a little early time to get the boy interested in the car; a letter from the Memphis harlot, one Everbe Corinthia; the death of Lucius's Grandfather Lessep; a meeting in town with cousins Ike McCaslin and Zack Edmonds before Lucius and Boon deliver the nurse and the younger Priests to McCaslin; weather; the family's habit of going to New Orleans on any excuse, a habit which often extends their wanderings beyond the time a schoolboy might be kept from his books; and, finally, the uselessness of the Priest automobile for this funeral trip.

The "baptism" of Faulkner's young gentleman/picaroon into the world of experience is not, however, required by these fortuitous but ordinary circumstances. Boon would not have started for Tennessee in his employer's vehicle without Lucius's accompaniment. And the boy could have stopped him at any moment. The point is that he is never about to demur or to lock up the car; he wants to "play with it" himself, to be a juvenile Faustus (pp. 53, 58, 60, 66, 93, 94). And Ned (Boon's bright Negro counterpart in the Priest menage) joins in the mischief because he knows how things stand between Boon and Lucius. On the latter's commitment to Non-virtue the subsequent action turns—and on the residue of *noblesse* brought along into mischief with his identity as "Priest from Jefferson" so as to secure the fable's happy issue once he learns what Non-virtue entails.

At first, of course, Lucius appears to be superior to Boon's blandishments. Then he complains that whatever powers have disposed the aforementioned pattern of coincidence have deprived him of free agency (pp. 57, 63, 68); he imagines that the function of Providence is to close up the primrose path before him, as a parent would prevent a child from playing some dangerous game. It is in this vein that Lucius almost asks for punishment from his father at the end of the novel, with all the reivers and the Winton back in Jef-

ferson. And it is also part of what is finally rejected there, when Boss Priest tells him that he is ready now to live as a man and a gentleman. For a gentleman "accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences, even when he did not instigate them but only acquiesced to them, didn't say No though he knew he should" (p. 302). As one "secure behind that inviolable and inescapable rectitude" of his name and "patterned on the knightly shapes of . . . male ancestors as bequeathed—nay compelled" to him by his "father's word-of-mouth," Lucius first imagines himself to be invulnerable to sin (pp. 50-51). Then he regresses to the idea that his parents and his grandfather will cancel out its consequences (p. 66). But finally the madness of motion-speed-power (pp. 46, 53, 55) seizes Lucius in "an exultant feverflash."⁶ As with most of us, his ruin was unobtrusive and easy—like the tone of Chapter II. Faulkner is no sentimentalist about children. Their innocence is basically a negative condition; all men sin once they are able. And Lucius is, as Chapter III begins, more than negatively innocent only by reason of his upbringing, his sense of who he is and of how "roguishness" (p. 294) contradicts that identity.

The pace of the novel picks up swiftly once Boon has recruited the cover and co-conspirator he needs as a security against excessive ire from the elder Priest. He and Lucius will go to Memphis in the Winton, visit "folks he knows there," and return before the family gets back from New Orleans. Lucius will get to drive, and no harm done. But once Lucius allows the Flyer to pass the turn to McCaslin in silence, the focus of the book comes down on him with finality. Previous ambling and casualness have assisted the narrator in specifying the nature of his theme. Boon will bring young Priest into a whore house, face to face with sexual license and the abuse of women in a degree not conceivable to his inherited code. And Ned Williams McCaslin, the sly privileged servant of traditional comedy, will swap the Flyer for an erratic but (for Ned) manageable racehorse and thus provide Lucius with a symbolically appropriate means for reacting to what he sees at Miss Reba's. Moreover, Ned provides a setting and a measure of peril necessary to the enactment of honor's ancient magic. Nonetheless, it is Lucius's emerging

moral sense—possible only after he has the “knowledge of good and evil”—and growing determination to act upon that sense which are at the center of what transpires once the reivers pass the last fork in their path and turn up the high road to the local version of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Flyer, as a trope, is a figuring forth and extension of everyman's disposition to dominate and stand above his human limitations: the disposition which makes possible the conversion of sex into a mere commodity. It is the ancient bond between the delights of power and pleasures of irresponsible sensuality, a common denominator which Faulkner often emphasized. And Lightning (or Coppermine), the racehorse for which it is “traded,” symbolizes, with Lucius on his back, attempting to recover car and deliver himself and all of his companions from their own particular bondage in folly, the older, cooperative relationship to the given features of creaturehood which traditionally had, in Western man, contained such excesses of the private will.⁷ That Ned leaves the car behind (and risks the loss of it and the horse) in order to enact his own kind of patriarchy, to save a black kinsman from Jefferson who is caught in the toils of Memphis's underworld infrastructure, only reinforces these symbolic relationships. That, and also what Lucius is told about “pugnuckling” by Corrie's nephew during his first night in town; and Lucius's fight with said Otis in response to the explanation; and Mr. Binford's (Miss Reba's “gentleman” coproprietor) slap at his insistence on manners, word, and dignity; and his conversation with Corrie as she binds his wounds after he has fought for her name. And this is to say nothing of the gentility of Uncle “Possum” (Parsham) and his black family in the small West Tennessee community where Lightning is to run; of the vicious deputy sheriff Butch Lovemaiden, the arm of the law in that place; or its worthy constable, Mr. Poleymus; or a dozen other vectors of influence and example which converge upon the boy once he identifies what it is that he “smells” at Miss Reba's (p. 99). For then the novel's action turns (pp. 153-58).

Lucius's presence spoils Boon's plans for a “holiday” with Everbe. Once Lucius is cut by her nephew's knife, she goes “out of business,” and then Boon's perception of his need for the girl

begins to change. At that point Ned removes the Flyer and brings Lightning (as he calls the horse which he and Bobo "borrowed" from the stable where Bobo had worked) to Miss Reba's to draw Boon and Lucius, plus the permanent inhabitants of that "residence," with him into the country, to a track where a stake race is arranged. There is a little explanation—enough to draw others (and their money) into Ned's sly plan, and talk of a victory gift to placate Boss Priest. There is a train ride with the horse out to Parsham, a few miles east of Memphis. Uncle Parsham and his kin then appear and soon thereafter Butch. But Lucius is at this point on his way home, Everbe is on her way out of prostitution, and Boon is on his way to the altar.

To find out how it is to be a rebel, what it is like to drive the Flyer and be released from the ordinary limitations of speed and distance, and to experience a little of the feeling that goes with ordinary adult status, Lucius is eager to pass Ballenbaugh's station and to ford the Styx of Hell Creek Bottom, there to face the formidable Charon of its "mudhole farmer." He is furthermore glad to have Ned along, once he comes out of hiding in the back of the car. Everything is for this trio a lark. It will be as easy to go back from "pleasure island" as it appears to be to get there—easy even though the automobile symbolically fails them at Hell Creek, and no one is left free to believe he did not will its theft and the consequent trip. Here the reivers are by Virtue "relinquished . . . to Non-virtue to cherish and nurture and coddle in the style to whose right [they] had won with the now irrevocable barter of [their] souls" (pp. 93-94). *But not really.* For Lucius is soon out of place once in Memphis. And as soon as he faces the risk of not being able to return home intact, as the Lucius Priest he knows himself to be, the boy says *no*. And, as he explains it to Corrie, with the authority of that identity in something he didn't "have to promise anybody," Lucius is bound to draw others after him (p. 218). Bobo Beauchamp, Ned's cousin with a gambling debt to a white man, delays and complicates the trip back; and he, along with others (Butch, Everbe in the backsliding which Butch forces on her, and Boon in his violent reaction), almost causes young Priest to despair of humankind and give up on his "passengers." But he rights himself quickly, especial-

ly once he has found a surrogate for Boss Priest in Uncle Parsham and his opportunity in the “borrowed” Coppermine becomes apparent. From that point onward Lucius steers one course. His is finally the disinterested chivalry of *noblesse oblige* or magnanimity; and his only reward for that nobility is its successful testing before his friends—that and the child of Corrie and Boon, Lucius Priest Hogganbeck, with word of which the novel ends.

Boss Priest catches up with his trio of runaways in time to see Lucius’s triumph in the stake race (p. 274). And then, of course, he takes over the management of things. His is the voice which insists that Lucius not go back to being a child, the patriarchal figure who tells us at the end that the story has been about gentlemen and their utility in a well-ordered world. It is a scene which filmed well in the recent (and imperfect) movie version of the book. And it specifies unmistakably its character as conduct literature. Men will make mistakes. And Nature must be served, at least a little. But some things cannot be suffered, even outside of our immediate connection, if “home” is to survive. Caring for children, women, and land is the business of the patriarch. And patriarch is what Lucius was becoming, even at eleven. Boon cannot love Corrie (as he does) and not be responsible for her all the time. Corrie cannot love him and neglect to channel his manhood within ordinate bounds. Lucius activates their sense of place in relation to each other. The rest is inevitable—like the results of the race once Lightning sees and smells the sardines in Ned’s hand.⁸

It would be possible to say a great deal more about the merits of specific comic episodes in this novel—about the drama of the horse race, the trickery of Ned, the digressions on politics and on cats, rats, mules, and horses. But these have not been my subject. I have considered the relationship of *The Reivers*’ form to its social implications and have emphasized this relationship because it is the aspect of Faulkner which the modernist reader is most likely to misconstrue. In most respects Faulkner was an old-fashioned Southerner. And the last thing he had to tell his readers was that being an old-fashioned Southerner of his class and culture is not a bad idea.

NOTES

1. For an illustration of this view, see Walter Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy: Essays on Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).

2. I cite throughout the first edition of *The Reivers* (New York: Random House, 1962). Page references are included within the text. For a representative cross-section of previous comment on *The Reivers*, see:

a. William Rossky, "The *Reivers*: Faulkner's *Tempest*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XVIII (Spring, 1965), 82-93;

b. William Rossky, "The *Reivers* and 'Huckleberry Finn': Faulkner and Twain," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XXVIII (August, 1965), 373-87;

c. William and Doris Donnelly, "William Faulkner: In Search of Peace," *Personalist*, XLIV (Autumn, 1963), 490-98;

d. Elmo Howell, "In Ole Mississippi: Faulkner's Reminiscence," *Kansas Magazine*, 1965 (n.v.) 77-81;

e. J. M. Mellard, "Faulkner's 'Golden Book': *The Reivers* as Romantic Comedy," *Bucknell Review*, XIII (December, 1965), 19-31;

f. Elizabeth M. Kerr, "The *Reivers*: The Golden Book of Yoknapatawpha County," *Modern Fiction Studies*, XIII (Spring, 1967), 95-113;

g. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 349-68;

h. Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable and Co., 1966), pp. 253-58;

i. Joseph Gold, *William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), pp. 274-87.

j. Ben M. Vorpahl, "Moonlight at Ballenbaugh's: Time and Imagination in *The Reivers*," *Southern Literary Journal*, I (Spring, 1969), 3-26.

3. The great models of the conduct book are Renaissance works such as Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour*, and Henry Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman*. They were Spenser's model for *The Faerie Queene* and are implicit in much other literature written in later times. Of course, a certain self-consciousness concerning nurture goes with such composings. And self-consciousness, especially when established in a dramatic frame, is the raw material of the lyric.

4. See *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 275-340. This opening chapter of Book IV was written as a short story ("Spotted Horses") before the rest of the Snopes material—in a very brief version, before all other Yoknapatawpha fiction. And even in this beginning Faulkner's subject was the fundamental human weakness of desiring, or insisting upon, better than what is providentially provided: a disposition which drives the species to seek "short-cuts" to an artificial transcendence, something for nothing. Endurance, as Faulkner uses the word, is the opposite of such flight from creaturehood. See my "Spotted Horses and the Short-Cut to Paradise: A Note on the Endurance Theme in Faulkner," *Louisiana Studies*, IV (Winter, 1965), 324-31.

5. *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 283-305.

6. It is noteworthy that Boss Priest, though he comes swiftly to hate his own automobile, plans to buy road bonds to protect his bank and its depositors because "People will pay any price for motion. They will even work for it . . . [though] we don't know why" (p. 41).

7. This traditional conception of the task of the gentleman, steering Nature into useful channels without attempting to stifle it, is made explicit in Lucius's conversation with Uncle Parsham Hood just before the boy undertakes to ride Coppermine in order to get back home:

for Uncle Parsham makes use of a Southern variant of an ageless symbol, that of the chariot and the charioteer, though in his version it is the mule and the muledriver. And in doing so, he frames his guest's upcoming encounter with Acheron (pp. 245-46). His theme is the difference between power and wisdom.

8. The structure of *The Reversers* much resembles that of Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, though like many comedies it ends with a new birth—not a rebirth.

Looking Down from a High Place: The Serenity of Miss Welty's *Losing Battles*

The gifted company of artists who in the past four decades overcame the logic of their times and gave a serious, indigenous literature to the American South is now, for the most part, dispersed. And the few of their number who remain alive write, Robert Penn Warren excepted, less and less. Even the so-called "second-generation" grows old, less numerous, and silent.¹ Therefore a new novel by one of the progenitors—a major effort after fifteen years—is by definition an event: a changing and completion for the total shape, the proportions, of this unusual phase in the history of modern letters.² A respectful awareness of what Eudora Welty has accomplished and of her place as a central figure in the Southern Renaissance inevitably conditions our reception of her new opus. And it should. For *Losing Battles* draws upon the resources of its kindred predecessors among Southern books and is on its face an allusion to the corpus of Renaissance fiction: both to earlier creations by Miss Welty and to the work of her peers, both in theme and in form. Indeed, as does any artifact produced within the confines of an established literary tradition, this novel insists that it be read with its given milieu in mind.

The rich texture of *Losing Battles* presents special problems to

the critic. Probably its overall effect is to divert the careful reader's attention away from the fable by which its steady and vital flow is sustained, a tactic often used by Miss Welty in her short stories.

Yet there is an action in this novel, an action familiar to those who have read William Faulkner, Caroline Gordon, Katherine Anne Porter, Andrew Lytle, and Allen Tate. With a description of that "movement of the spirit" and of its causes, formal critical consideration must begin.

The issue in *Losing Battles* is, in a word, cultural survival: whether or not a yeoman, hill country version of the familial order that *was the South* (despite some confusion over Negroes) can absorb and adjust to an alien pressure; whether, and, if so, how?³ The governing presences here are all women: Mrs. Beulah Renfro (the matriarchal extension of her Grandmother Vaughn, whose ninetieth birthday is the book's time and whose old, plain, and rambling home is its setting); Miss Julia Mortimer, the village schoolmarm and the antagonist of all that is meant by Vaughn, Renfro, and Beecham (the divisions of the family); and, finally, young Gloria Short Renfro, Beulah's daughter-in-law, wife to Jack (the hope of the Renfro clan), and Miss Mortimer's chosen successor as bringer of light into Banner's complacent darkness (p. 244). As had old Granny Vaughn in her time and Beulah (or Miss Mortimer) in the present, Gloria must decide "how it will be."⁴ And, even before the narrative begins, even before her Jack returns from the penitentiary year he spent for her and the family's sake, Gloria has in her own way chosen. In loving Jack, she disappoints Miss Mortimer; yet, as she informs the Renfros on every opportunity, she *will not be another Beulah*, will not "disappear" in a role (pp. 171, 268, 315). While she awaits her husband's coming from Parchman, Mississippi's great outdoor farm prison, we are belabored with the fact of her identity and with its importance to what that recovery will mean. But, if Miss Mortimer (*qua* "uplift" as principle) and the forces personified in Beulah (will-to-be-family or prescription) will not have the victory, neither will Gloria's desire for a private existence with Jack and their children (pp. 320, 435). Jack makes that much unmistakable. The injustice of his year in prison, his bad taste of the great world, has somewhat cir-

cumscribed his boyhood innocence. More "education" follows hard after his arrival in Banner. Yet he is now *the* Renfro, the centerpiece and lifegiver for all who share his blood. And he accepts that place as an *a priori* fact, accepts it despite disappointment at the loss of his horse, his truck, or his simple notion of physical pride: even if he cannot have his planned revenge on Curly, his local Nemesis, or upon the Miss Mortimer-trained county judge who first sentenced him for assault upon said Curly (pp. 362, 434). For he now has an identity in *both* love and duty. His promise, announced aforesometimes in the new tin roof on the Renfro home, must now be performed.

Gloria, in choosing him, acknowledges much of his self-definition of love and duty—is yet affirming it as they make love for the first time since their separation (pp. 361-62) and later as they head home together (at the book's end), she riding the horse he leads and Jack singing the old Southern folk hymn, "Bringing in the Sheaves." This harvest will be partial, unequal to the long planting (or to the great tree, major symbol of the novel, which presides over their reunion). For Miss Julia, incarnation of modernity on the march, has had some effect. And there will never be, therefore, another day like this one for "the family." Everyone loses a little. Yet there will come a "harvest" and a season for rejoicing (p. 436).

As we might expect, much of the early comment on *Losing Battles* shows a misconception of the pattern I have just described. The trouble was, of course, Miss Julia.⁵ Being children of our times, the reviewers could find no other character in the novel with whom they might comfortably identify, no one operating within the book by whom they could measure the action there unfolded—that is, without surrendering part of their identity as heirs of the Enlightenment. In the 1930's the Julia Mortimers of the South were coming into their own. By 1941 the presiding figures of the region were less and less certainly the heads of landed families, political spokesmen, lawyers, and clergy. Teachers—with the support of business and professional men whom they had helped to train, plus a new breed of journalist, and the ubiquitous helpful "outside" visitors—rose to be figures of reference and instruments of altera-

tion. Everyone cried out for the public school, even though the South had always been slow to kindle with this New England enthusiasm for the Faustian; and no one cried out more vocally than the prototypes of Miss Welty's confused reviewers, be they home grown, like Judge Moody, or "imported," like the founders of the Normals (colleges of education) where schoolmarms were manufactured out of ex-Presbyterian girls with a secularized eschatology. But Eudora Welty is old enough and perceptive enough to know her world both ways: wise enough to know that most monomaniacal efforts to "make the world better" (p. 250) do not secure the results intended.

Julia Mortimer's role in Miss Welty's new work is, therefore clearly hedged by and enmeshed in comedy. Furthermore, despite hieratic or honorific touches underlining her portrait, that astonishing lady is made to complete the gentle and affectionate satire of her career by adding a self-judgment. Hers is one comedy among many, though sharper than the rest. The evidence of the text is plain. The mood, here as elsewhere, is elegiac. I shall explain.

First of all, a number of Miss Julia's former students speak of her as an "inspiration" (p. 244). Her impact, on girls especially was to encourage them to play St. George to the dragon Ignorance to live up to their private intellectual and moral potential, and then (alone) escape the smothering matrix of family and the dead hand of the past: escape in order to impose themselves upon a piece of creation with the shining vesture of learning and words for their own sake as an excuse. That is, she directed them to emulate her own triumph in that paradigmatic moment when a pupil of her school (Gloria) "spells down" the members of the lower house of the Mississippi state legislature (p. 242). Miss Julia's ultimate vision is of a world of individuals who are uninhibited in their self-perfecting and good works: uninhibited because they are unrestricted by entangling alliances which might obscure their vision of perfection to come. All of this impersonal will-to-progress is specified in the references to Miss Mortimer's missionary heritage to her sale of the family home "behind her," to her desire to be buried under the very threshold of Banner School, to the wooden

admonition of her letters, her ungracious social habits, and her other crotchets. Such a teacher is certainly the harbinger of death for the communal place-rooted and time-ignoring life of Banner, an augury of the bourgeois and idealist-rationalist atomization of modern commercial and industrial civilization. She is a splendid woman—a marvel to all who know her (and a great waste as spinster in the eyes of the ladies of her county). And, as her burial on the day following the reunion indicates, she did leave a substantial intellectual progeny. *But they are not in or of Banner.* For the time, her people (and we can call them this, despite their differences) resist and absorb her. She will rest in their midst, pitied, in the Banner graveyard with the elders and founders of the local “tribes.” Moreover, Miss Julia halfway understands why. Her last words are in a deathbed letter to Judge Moody. There she admits that, in order to be themselves, in order to survive as they understand their identity (and they can conceive of no other), her pupils were obliged to resist her (p. 298). Therefore she calls her “failure” good, for pupil *and* teacher. For she has herself lived only by inspiration (p. 298)—a courageous will to survive in her function or without it: “. . . the side that gets licked gets to the truth first. When the battle is over, something may down those with no help from the teacher, no help from the pupil, and no help from the book” (p. 298). In this, her wisdom is one with that of Beulah Renfro: the chief business of life is “standing it” (p. 360).

The title for this essay should by now be intelligible. *Losing Battles* is indeed an elegiac novel. And the elegiac as a mode of aesthetic perception invariably rests upon an affirmation of good losing: upon defeats like Jack’s in going to prison to pay for—as he understands after-the-fact—his Uncle Nathan’s murder of one Dearman (the enterprising and ultra-modern despoiler of the county, both land and people, and the probable father of Gloria); defeats like Judge Moody’s when he realizes that he needs the Beecham-Renfro connection (to recover his car and to “forgive” him by not forgiving him for Jack’s incarceration) as much as they need him; defeats like weather and soil and poverty and stubborn ignorance, as they encroach upon Banner. In the elegiac, wisdom is spawned out of hard truth. Then it is quietly and yet affectionately

affirmed. The human lot, beneath the noise of politics or intellectual, religious, and economic change, remains constant. And the instruments we can find for dealing with it, in joy and resignation, are the old ones: honor, courage, charity, honesty, loyalty, and memory. Love likewise keeps a place here, and also family, which is its natural issue. (It is significant that the author dedicates this book to the memory of her brothers.) In this connection, work and a little hope make sense—as do even education and the multiplication of words. But to remember Captain Billy Bangs, the eldest of the Banner elders, if the world be “round and spinning,” it is possible to be overimpressed by those facts (p. 24). His words are heavy when he mocks Miss Julia for schooling him in such undeniable fact. Yet he calls her “daughter.”

What the texture of *Losing Battles* adds in support of the pattern I have here been describing is authority: purchase by way of distance, by way of a masterful employment of the serio-comic tone. Comic, I say, but not ironic as with cosmic or philosophic irony. The initial lushness of early pages is consciously overdone.⁶ Miss Welty's manner, in confronting the Creation, says “yes” to the “given.” Her imagination is the submissive, observing faculty which, years ago, Donald Davidson identified as the informing characteristic of the new Southern literature. To use Allen Tate's term, it is not of the “angelic” order, not bent upon remaking. Miss Welty offers no cures. Before her memories she submits in order to recover the meaningful shape of a history she has experienced. She does not tell us “how” about anything. From her high perspective, it is clear that such lofty enterprises are to no purpose. The “what” of things is of more importance. This she does not mistake.

NOTES

1. I speak of such authors as Peter Taylor, Walter Sullivan, William Humphrey, Ovid Williams Pierce, Madison Jones, Walker Percy, Jesse Stuart, and Reynolds Price. Flannery O'Connor, James Agee, and Randall Jarrell are, of course, prematurely silent by reason of their deaths. Guy Owens, George Garrett, and William Styron do not quite belong inside the tradition, though they may, for particular works, be included. Likewise the poet James Dickey and the poet-novelist John Corrington. (Some of these people, it may be argued, are "third generation.")

2. *Losing Battles* (New York: Random House, 1970).

3. In a fundamental sense, the entire South was a family rather than a regime or state (as the political philosophers speak of these things). Seen in terms of one or another of its characteristic gestures, it could be called either patriarchal or matriarchal. Moreover, as Andrew Lytle has insisted, particular families were "the institution of Southern life" (*The Hero with the Private Parts* [Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press, 1966], p. 76). The Beecham-Renfro clan, in the framework of Banner, is therefore a suitable illustration of the regional macrocosm. The members have no full identity outside of the connection (p. 346). They live by memory and periodically celebrate their oneness in such sacramental ceremonies as reunion, marriage, and burial. They keep no law above the prescription of group memory (p. 325). The recitation of that memory is, as we would expect, part of each of their gatherings (p. 180 *et seq.*). And of course, the events of this birthday-homecoming-reunion become part of the story, and as Uncle Noah Webster observes, are "... never to be forgotten" (p. 354).

The point of all this use of family as paradigm would be lost if blacks had a part in this book because their presence would have diverted critic and reader from its meaning. For the South had a familial character from its founding, and before blacks were introduced there. (Cf. Richard Weaver's many studies of the regional mind for documentation).

4. Women are the particular repositories of the Southern pieties. Along with place (see Miss Welty's maps), they anchor a society. (Eudora Welty's famous disquisition, "Place in Fiction," appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LV [January, 1956], 57-72.) Beulah Renfro cannot imagine why Judge Moody knows so much of Miss Mortimer unless he "aspired" to her or was her kin. As for men, Beulah adds, they "... don't realize anything" (p. 199). In this she resembles the oracular ladies of *Delta Wedding* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946). Assuredly, this new novel is, like the tale of "Shellmound", a "woman's book."

5. As representative of these reviews, I cite Louis D. Rubin's "Everything Brought Out in the Open: Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*," *Hollins Critic*, VIII (June, 1970), 1-12. Rubin insists that Miss Julia teaches Banner folk "the ultimate consequences of their humanity." See in contrast Lewis Simpson's "The Chosen People," in *Southern Review*, VI (Summer, 1970), xvii, xix, xxi-xxiii.

6. A thorough reading of *Losing Battles* would concentrate on the novel's slow unfolding and upon the role of conversation—tale-telling—as a vehicle for rendering action within that unfolding.

PART II

Rumors of Mortality: An Introduction to Allen Tate

John Orley Allen Tate was in each of his now familiar roles—as poet, critic, historian, novelist, and diagnostician of cultural decline—always very much the same person his friends knew and respected soon after he came down from the Bluegrass to take a degree at Vanderbilt. Or, at least he moved steadily toward being that very exceptional person: completing, not altering, the fledgling original. His precocity as an undergraduate is to this day proverbial. At twenty he knew literature to be his proper business and was on his way through the standard classics of poetry in English; at twenty-one he had confronted and mastered many of the French, English, and expatriate American innovators of the era; and, finally, upon graduation and after an apprenticeship with *The Fugitive*, the first distinctive Southern magazine of verse, he commenced immediately to challenge his own resolve and to test his poetic and critical ability and preparation. This past, like that of the other members of the Fugitive and Agrarian circles, was prologue. It foreshadowed all that was to come from talent well employed. For Tate continued to set a mark for his peers and juniors in the literary fraternity while playing his chosen, public role: continued to hold an advantage in soundness of critical judgment and in the easy

authority with which he endowed that faculty's responsible exercise while writing and judging of writing.

But if the consistency of Tate's achievement is noteworthy, even more so is its aforementioned variety. The one description does not belie the other; rather, it confirms. In the consciously sculptured poetry the critic is revealed; the poet is obviously present in the range and emphasis of the criticism. Both poet and critic are revealed in the single major venture into fiction, *The Fathers*, as well as in the socio-political documents. Without a doubt, the total performance of Allen Tate is one of the remarkable achievements of this specialized, compartmental age: a greater wonder because it appeared and flourished in the company of many kindred marvels. As his critics have noted, Tate, like most of the original Nashville fellowship, is an example of that now rare species—the man of letters in the antique European sense. Of their number (and perhaps among all of his American contemporaries), he is the most complete modern example. Hence, it is unwise to take apart, by kind or chronology, his overall career. With John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Andrew Nelson Lytle, or Donald Davidson, distortion inevitably follows upon such conventional procedure. The result with Tate would be even worse; and for reasons thus detailed, he is here considered in all of his capabilities.

The logical ground for their exposition is biography: an account of the *a priori* cultural "given" as it directed and circumscribed man and poet. Admittedly, such a design is not adopted for the sake of its rhetorical merit. The resistance of Tate, the man of letters, to all familiar formulations will allow for no less difficult approach; even this tactic is ultimately inadequate. Of a piece though his work may be, it is an irrefrangibly complicated study. Fortunately, there are instruments, thematic and aesthetic which make possible at least a beginning.

Maryland, Virginia, Caroline
Pent images in sleep
Clay valleys rocky hills old fields of pine
Unspeakable and deep

Out of that source of time my farthest blood
Runs strangely to this day
Unkempt the fathers waste in solitude
Under the hills of clay

Far from their woe fled to its thither side
To a river in Tennessee
In an alien house I will stay
Yet find their breath to be
All that my stars betide—

("Emblems," 1-13')

Almost everything that can be argued of Tate is attributable to the place and time of his birth, Clark County, Kentucky, November 19, 1899; and to the kind of family into which he came, a combination of the basic Southern strains, upcountry and tidewater. Something very similar might be said of most Southern writers of his generation, certainly of his immediate literary connections. It follows in part with all those who contributed to that most Southern of modern books, *I'll Take My Stand*.² But it cannot be asserted of Tate on these grounds alone; for that volume drew together intransigent individualists who after its publication (1930) demonstrated their variety, even with regard to the South. Yet any who would dispute the generalization should read Tate's own essays—for example, "The Profession of Letters in the South" or "A Southern Mode of the Imagination"—and then let those who doubt consider what it once meant to be a Southerner, insofar as a world view was implied by the designation.³ There are, despite much dispute, a hundred useful authorities on the subject (the best is Richard Weaver). But for my purposes in this essay, a brief summary and syncretism will have to do: a summary intended to illuminate the design and the burden of what Tate produced with his pen.

First of all, a Southerner has (or had) a certain piety toward Being and the disposition of its components as he encounters them. The effects of history, nature, and the fruits of personal choice enjoy in his eyes a prescriptive status; they are either the imposed will of an inscrutable Providence or the operations of a natural law set up by that Providence to accommodate human free agency to its purposes. Man himself is among these constants, his moral and mental

constitution (and therefore his potential for mischief or improvement) itself one of the "givens," one of the imposed features of a less than malleable frame of things. Next, the Southerner is little disposed to exalt envy or Promethean overreaching into spiritual principles—and therefore is ordinarily immune to the characteristic viruses of the modern dispensation. But because modernity has always surrounded the Southerner and because he has never been allowed to forget that it is there, his typical mood is one of alarm: in brief, it is apocalyptic. Hence, he is a baleful supernaturalist, rationally distrustful of unaided private reason, not teleological, and not in any way (save as he regards death and wickedness) egalitarian. Natural law having been everywhere violated by presumptuous assaults on Being, by arrogant attempts to rearrange or improve on the exactions of the divine will, future history is bound to register God's displeasure. All of which is to say that the Southerner is very much out of step with the temper of the abstract "nation" within whose boundaries he must act his part, very far removed from the Adamic New England mentality that defines itself (and the United States with it) over against Europe—and against history in the largest sense. He has no feeling of special innocence or special guilt, no millennialist or fatalistic eschatology, and no compelling desire to impose his viewpoint on others or to display his soul to the public view. The Southerner, without being cramped or confined in the process, is what he is by definition, a traditional man. He does not evolve and is not converted, except perhaps from sin or simplicity. He does not work at being Southern or think about it; and he is happy to be free of the necessity of discovering the world for himself.

Now it is certain that Allen Tate did not subscribe to all these propositions all of the time or with equal conviction. But then, in the South, they are not ideas in the strict sense of the word. Rather, they are ingredients in what we usually mean by "sensibility." Until the time of World War I they remained axioms, commonplaces too well accepted to be much discussed. For Tate or any other Southern writer they were the inevitable point of departure, the referent of which they became conscious only when alternative assumptions became familiar to them. They can, with difficulty, be

rejected or revised. But ignored, never. Certain details or facets of Tate's work are, of course, available to other explanation. And I must specify, before continuing, that by "South" or "Southern" I mean in this connection (as Tate did from the first and even in the midst of the Agrarian effort of 1929-1937) the entire framework of civility and proportion, the general accordance of status and function as conditioned by manners usually signified by "Christendom" or "the West." It is a provincialism in space which precludes the now characteristic provincialism in time, an ontological and epistemological posture more than a political position: a view of Being and of ways in which it may be known. The dynamic of American and European history plus climate, the Negro, and a certain collective stubbornness permitted its implausible survival below Mason and Dixon's line. To repeat, only an American Southerner with his memory intact and his eyes open to the world around him could, in the second and third quarters of this century, have produced Tate's commentary, his verse, or his fiction.

The second important biographical factor is the circumstance of fortuitous associations. Mr. Tate grew up in Kentucky (with occasional visits to relations in Virginia) and there received the fragments of a preparatory schooling, rounded with a year at an academy affiliated with Georgetown University. What befell Allen Tate in his early years was largely what could be expected in the old Kentucky world of farms and small towns: a world still suffused with the recollection of injuries long past and with the consequences of those misfortunes. That their effect would be confirmed and made indelible by the choice of a university could by no means have been foreseen. Nor was it possible to predict that other young writers would at approximately the same time make the same selection. Nonetheless, the difference that this choice and these associations made is well recorded in Louise Cowan's *The Fugitive Group* and in Virginia Rock's study of the Agrarian movement, "The Making and Meaning of *I'll Take My Stand*: A Study in Utopian Conservatism, 1925-1939."⁴ No more mutually auspicious conjunction of talent has occurred in the region's literary history. Assuredly it did nothing to dilute Tate's Southernness. When we

add the significance of Tate's first marriage (1924—two years after finishing at Vanderbilt) to the novelist Caroline Gordon (another Kentuckian), the background is complete. What thereafter occurred in his life that is of importance to this essay is literary biography—which brings me back to Tate's poetry.

Though I have thus far stressed the traditional background of Tate's formative years, it was not with the intent to suggest that he came into his majority unaware of the developments in the great world outside of his homeland. Far more than most of his Nashville friends, young Tate knew that the "center will not hold" when "things fall apart." As he was the first of their company to master modernist poetry, the first to read and appreciate T. S. Eliot, so was he the earliest to recognize that his culture, though still worthy of defense and useful as a measure, was no longer intact. Furthermore, in combination with his grasp of the implications of scientism, urbanization, economic determinism, and depersonalized power politics, Tate came swiftly to understand why the South could not remain successfully "at bay." Very early he perceived, in philosophical terms, that inherent weaknesses foredoomed it to "absorption" into all that now passes for national and international "unity." And, knowing modernity and the sources of its power for what they are, this poet determined, in his early twenties—almost as soon as he began to write verse—what strategies could serve his purpose in addressing his intended audience. That tactic was, as I have already mentioned, highly conscious, dramatic, and impersonal—a procedure calculated (after Eliot, the French Symbolists, and Yeats) to circumvent the modern reader's resistance to poetry in general and to traditionalist poetry in particular. Contrivance and austerity are the usual complaints made against Tate's work, complaints which ignore the fury shaped and rendered by that conscious craft. Said simply, the assumption embodied in much of Tate's first two decades of poetry is that *persona means purchase*: that the modern reader can be influenced by dramatic presentation of a mind in motion to participate in attitudes or emotions he would not ordinarily tolerate if they were thrust upon him with direct assertion. It is true that Tate produced a little more or less straightforward meditative work throughout his

career. Moreover, the self-disguise in some of his poems is often so transparent as to have the effect of parody, not drama. In addition, there is indication in *The Winter Sea* (1944) and thereafter in "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake" of Tate's will to write in a less guarded, less oblique style: a desire to be the "symbolic" anagogical poet, after his new master, Dante (see his essay on that writer, "The Symbolic Imagination").⁵ Yet, despite a chastening of tone, a muting of the habitual metaphoric and prosodic violence and exaggeration, the original irony and indirection are still present in Tate's post-conversion, "Catholic" work. Even when he speaks in *propria persona* or in obvious sarcasm, dramatic properties remain in his voice, some inference that it is the Promethean positivist or his latter-day disoriented heir who is before us, who is sailing the cold sea and judging himself as he goes. The testimony of all members of the Fugitive circle is that Tate's fiery indirections in verse were the occasion of his most serious participation in their debates. That his poetry followed from the aesthetics and general assessment of poetic possibilities made in his twenties is the argument I shall next pursue.

Three or four of Tate's earliest poems will serve as a starting point for documentation of my previous generalizations on the indirect and dramatic property of his work: "Horatian Epode to the Duchess of Malfi," "Death of Little Boys," "Homily," and "The Subway." These clearly reveal the poet in the making. After them I shall turn to an inceptual statement of his purpose in (or view of) poetry, "Mr. Pope," and to the emergence of a distinctively Southern flavor in his work. Then I shall move to the major verse of his middle years, especially "Ode to the Confederate Dead," "To the Lacedemonians," "The Mediterranean," "Aeneas at Washington," "Message from Abroad," "Jubilo," and "Last Days of Alice." In concluding, I shall consider the effect of the poet's sense of genre and the importance of tonal progression on the variety and emphasis of his verse and then remark on the less ironic, post-1944 meditations identified above.

The "Horatian Epode" appeared in *The Fugitive* for October 1922.⁶ The little tribute to John Webster's high-spirited widow

(epodes are diminished odes—vehicles for something less than full-throated salute, for sentiments more casual or vulgar) is not, at first glance, dramatic—not a rendering of tension observed nor a searching mirror of disorder (compare “Tension in Poetry”). With Tate, as with T. S. Eliot and many others of their generation, there is a temptation to identify the speaker in a work with its maker. And, again as with Eliot, regardless of the reinforcement given such temptation by title, design, or even content, the poem disappears into pseudo-sophistical verbal posturing unless its reader realizes that Tate speaks through a mask, adopts a character (i.e., persona) so as to make that created, summary self available to the reader’s independent judgment. A vapid and world-weary species of subjective lyric assertion (what Tate in “The Angelic Imagination: Poe as God” calls “angelism”) and an equally artificial and even more limited “pure” (i.e., thought-free, value-free) imagism were the poetic modes in vogue when Tate began his career. Both are consequences of the aesthetic impasse toward which the entire craft had been moving since the Renaissance—since the abnegation of its ancient responsibilities forced upon poetry by the authority of positivistic science (see his 1965 *Southern Review* essay, “The Unliteral Imagination; Or, I, Too, Dislike It”).⁸ And, as Tate and his Fugitive friends recognized from the first, no poet serious about his calling could employ either. Yet these very modes did (and still do) define the expectations of any audience he could anticipate, condition the intellectual equipment brought to the reading or hearing of verse by even the most literate contemporary. There was only one way out of this trap, a procedure followed by some of the best poets since the seventeenth century and doubled in modern fiction by the artistry of Henry James and his heirs. The tactic is what Robert Langbaum has defined as “the poetry of experience”; it is a method for registering and figuring forth the recalcitrant particularity of “the world’s body” without either claiming the now-denied authority of the muse or refusing to exercise that authority.⁹ In refracting through telling language what is observed of that external complex of contingencies, the “submissive imagination” operates. “Horatian Epode” belongs to this poetic order.

The epigraph to this poem, as in so many others by Tate, is a clear indication of its meaning. The purpose of the speaker, as I said above, is to give voice to his admiration of the Duchess. She has lifted him into life, disturbed his naturalistic equanimity: has made him doubt the scientific myth (alluded to in references to "infusorian" and "eohippus") which replaced the old "divinities." From comfortable atheist, he has turned agnostic, a doubter of all "authorities" and thus a complete modern, in response to the "strict gesture" of her death which

Split the straight line of pessimism
Into two infinities

Webster's heroine, the subject of lines very much admired in the Twenties as exemplary poetry ("Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young"), recalls the classical analogy (a requirement of the epode as a stage in tribute) of a Greek girl who died for love. But the impression that can be made by even her pure "pride" in the heart's truth cannot draw this skeptic beyond his vision of "Probability"; nor can it compel him to deny that man is but a "salvatory of green mummy," a "box of worm-seed." The kathartic passion occurs only in a fully human audience. And soon enough the familiar ethos of "the street cars" that are "still running" cancels the heterodox impulse engendered by the play's reading. The effect rendered is not so much about the poem's announced theme or intent as it is about the voice it embodies. This modern, like the masks of his successors, is judged by himself—and his kind with him.

In "Death of Little Boys" Tate approaches the reader from a slightly different stance.¹⁰ But his topic and objective are unchanged. Here the poet stands just outside the mind of a representative contemporary. Yet, playing the epistemological poet once more, that mind is what he presents. And the impression we get is of consciousness rendered in motion and found wanting in the process.

The poem reads as follows:

When little boys grown patient at last, weary,
Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night,
The event will rage terrific as the sea;
Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light.

Then you will touch the bedside, torn in two,
Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray
As the windowpane extends a fear to you
From one peeled aster drenched with the wind all day.

And over his chest the covers in the ultimate dream
Will mount to the teeth, ascend the eyes, press back
The locks—while round his sturdy belly gleam
Suspended breaths, white spars above the wreck:

Till all the guests, come in to look, turn down
Their palms, and delirium assails the cliff
Of Norway where you ponder, and your little town
Reels like a sailor drunk in a rotten skiff.

The bleak sunshine shrieks its chipped music then
Out to the milkweed amid the fields of wheat.
There is a calm for you where men and women
Unroll the chill precision of moving feet.

Once more, death is the occasion—death, the chief of checks or mortal pride and traditionalist educator *par excellence*. More than other “rumors of mortality” (the phrase itself well describes the body of Tate’s verse), the passing of children scandalizes the positivist’s expectation of a secular beatitude, challenges his sense of total power over his condition. Hence, “the event will rage terrific as the sea” while “bodies fill a crumbling room with light.” For as contemplation of youthful remains indicts the delusion all men at times entertain—that we, in our “new wisdom,” are become gods and masters of our own respective fates—the beholder of those remains is bound to identify with them, to see in the “peeled aster” beyond the “windowpane” a memorial of his own corpse in “gray” upon the selfsame catafalque. Then for all the deathbed guests, the assembled townsfolk, there is only the maelstrom of “delirium,” a steady drifting into the great whirlpool of despair. In time-honored rituals alone, in the collective formalities of bereavement which contain (by implication) some affir

mation of death itself, is there surcease from the pain of disillusion, from the "immeasurable surrender." And even that, once the substance is gone out of the forms, is cold relief.

"Homily" contains advice for folk such as those troubled by "little boys grown patient at last"—advice within advice.¹¹ The poem is a short one:

If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out

If your tired unspeaking head
Rivet the dark with linear sight,
Crazed by a warlock with his curse
Dreameed up in some loquacious bed,
And if the stage-dark head rehearse
The fifth act of the closing night,

Why, cut it off, piece after piece,
And throw the tough cortex away,
And when you've marvelled on the wars
That wove their interior smoke its way,
Tear out the close vermiculate crease
Where death crawled angrily at bay.

The title refers to the epigraph, from Matthew 18:9. But here the offending member is the head, which "rivets the dark with linear sight." Its sleepless unease, however, is to its credit; and the eagerness of its possessor, in his waking hours, to be rid of the "warlock" of his dreams (a rationalist's equation of *memento mori* and superstition) is the folly by indirection considered. The effect of Tate's counsel to the unwillingly disturbed keeper of the new pieties is acidic and merciless. If the modern would be immune to the truth of his mortality, then he must cut down through the skull—through the seat of reason into the primitive fundament of his consciousness, "the close vermiculate crease," before he can isolate and remove the thought that troubles his subconscious. The suggestion here is plain: the cortex, full of the evidences of internal "wars," as the seat of vain notions, rules by day; and it would deny "the fifth act of the closing night." But the primordial components resist such nonsense, and in the "loquacious bed" the truth of man's destiny and origin "rehearse," *sub specie mortis*.

Another violent confrontation with the spirit of the times occurs in "The Subway."¹² This much admired sonnet is the "cold revery" of a character half persona and half person observed—something in between the presence in the two poems examined above. Its matter is infernal, and the hell it explores nothing but man-made and contemporary—the fruitage of wars in the cortex, the self-destructive impetus of rationalism. The subway's rushing underground descent metaphorically and perhaps even mythically informs and hardens the entire poem. Once more, as in "Death of Little Boys," madness is the consequence of an experience that is seen well into but not quite comprehended, a madness that has, after harsh disabusement, its only alternatives—that is, for a man who has had his faith in science—in the offhanded fashionable casualness of the voice in "Horatian Epode" or the self-destruction mockingly recommended in "Homily." This speaker, however, is aware of the satanism in the rush of his fellows in their "business of humility" down "into the iron forestries of hell." No streetcars can call him back nor any "chill precision" remove his memory of "angry worship." Therefore he comes again under the sky to find himself an "idiot," no longer capable of contemplating the universe under any aspect save those of geometry and associated subway-creating abstractions. He is like the Alice of Tate's later poem—or, rather, as she would have been had she been able to get back through the looking glass: "broken," but not reformed—dazed, while the "worldless heavens bulge and reel" above him.

"The Subway" is a good place for the turning of this discussion toward Tate's maturity. With such poems he found what was to be his characteristic manner in *Poems: 1928-1931* (1932); *The Mediterranean and Other Poems* (1936); and *Selected Poems* (1937).¹³ There is no wry irony here, no play. His fashion has become neo-metaphysical, even before 1930. And that is the tenor of much verse from his middle years. The comic and parodic, inflative and deflative mock-heroics which Tate admired in the English Augustans (and emulated) keeps its place in the work of the Thirties and late Twenties. But these ingredients are absorbed into something more serious and sober and, furthermore, are dignified

in the process, transformed into what they were not, as a line of meditation introduced by them takes its final startling shape. Moreover, with this shift the spirit in his work appears to be more and more public, less and less restrictively lyric, indirect, and narrowly dramatic. Though the searching of the fragmented sensibility continues, it is not ended *in vacuo*. A network of specific times, events, and circumstances is included. And the result is assuredly an additional poise and authority. Said another way, Allen Tate emerges with these changes as one of the characteristic poetic voices of his time—and as a Southern poet. The narrowly epistemological and ontological emphases of his earlier work are supplemented and defined by the addition of a frame of history perceived as a reflection of meaning: *his* teleology. The poetics with which Tate entered into this period and the degree of control and purposiveness which he hoped to bring to their application are specified in a poem which he wrote just before it began.

"Mr. Pope" may be set alongside Eliot's *Homage to John Dryden* and certain items by the Sitwells (Edith and Sacheverell), Roy Campbell, and T. E. Hulme as an early and curiously metaphysical acknowledgment from modern poetry of its debt to neo-classicism.¹⁴ In his poem Tate honors those qualities in Pope that he would have in himself.

When Alexander Pope strolled in the city
 Strict was the glint of pearl and gold sedans.
 Ladies leaned out more out of fear than pity
 For Pope's tight back was rather a goat's than man's.

To begin, Pope addressed himself to and commanded the respect of the world where he was born—both the "human condition" in general and "the total complex of sensibility and thought, belief and experience" which was eighteenth century England (see the essay "To Whom Is the Poet Responsible?").¹⁵

But there is another issue raised in the first quatrain, that of the private Alexander Pope—the deformed hunchback of less than five feet—and his connection with Pope the poet. Stanzas two and three deal with this question and turn it around to prepare for the peroration/eulogium of the last two lines:

Often one thinks the urn should have more bones
 Than skeletons provide for speedy dust,
 The urn gets hollow, cobwebs brittle as stones
 Weave to the funeral shell a frivolous rust.

And he who dribbled couplets like a snake
 Coiled to a lithe precision in the sun
 Is missing. The jar is empty; you may break
 It only to find that Mr. Pope is gone.

What requisitions of a verity
 Prompted the wit and rage between his teeth
 One cannot say. Around a crooked tree
 A moral climbs whose name should be a wreath.

All is quiet, restrained, conversational though forceful and well calculated. The person who is *Mr. Alexander Pope* (the formal address is no mere Southernism) is unavailable—"missing." The urn can contain far more than the flesh provides. No answer to the question of why the poet flailed the Dunces and "bit" (Pope liked the word and hence Tate's snake imagery) whatever enraged him can be extracted from "speedy dust." Put otherwise (as for instance in Tate's essay "Narcissus as Narcissus"; also in his "Miss Emily and the Bibliographer" and in the aforementioned "The Unliteral Imagination"), earlier Romantic and more recent psychological criticism of the work of traditional poets is beside the point.¹⁶ All that Tate will say of his subject is that he *did* draw drafts, as with a bank, on a truth; *did* refract in the language of which he was a faithful steward the shape and feel of what he found before him. And the consequence of his character *qua* poet was a "strictness" (an enactment of "fear") in that polity. Such, Tate has argued, in essay after essay, is the duty of the poet: to create communion, not communication; self-contained wholes or "incarnations" for contemplation, not marching orders or testimonials ("Literature as Knowledge," "Tension in Poetry," and "To Whom Is the Poet Responsible?"). He does not deny that the motives behind a man's creations are rooted in his "personality" (hence the organic figure, the tree, and its peculiarity, crookedness). But he insists that, if the artist is to be loyal to his craft, it is the handiwork that should interest us, the thing made and not the subliminal causes of its

fashioning. Therefore, upon a crooked tree (the Pope *with us*: the work, not the urn) gathers a moral (i.e., aesthetic) that deserves a poem.

For reasons abstracted from "Mr. Pope" it is evident that there might be some danger of explaining away Tate's Southern poems with references to his two Confederate biographies (*Stonewall Jackson* [1928]; *Jefferson Davis* [1929]) and his part in the Agrarian effort of the Thirties.¹⁸ Admittedly, the topical properties of these poems are unmistakable; and such details do recall facets of Tate's polemic. In addition, that Southernness, it must be recognized, is altogether diverting in its purchase upon any ordinary modern. However, it may at least be maintained that it is not as versified dogma that these works are Southern. Nonetheless, the temptation to read them more or less that way has thus far seduced many of their careful expositors. To speak plainly, I am convinced that it is the regional flavor of these compositions (and the repute their author had acquired by the time of their appearance) which has put off those critics who are neither traditionalists nor Southerners and has caused them to forget their proper function. In a sense, the psychology that has obstructed the reception of the Confederate "Ode," "To the Lacedemonians," "Jubilo," and related productions is itself subject and target of these verses.

Probably for all the wrong reasons "Ode to the Confederate Dead" is the most famous of Tate's poems.¹⁹ Let me specify that I say this respectfully. It is a fine work, exceptional from the start and refined over the years by careful revision. Indeed, it is likely one of the most influential and characteristic of twentieth century poems. But, it is not an ode; nor is it principally about the dead, or a celebration of anything Southern—and even if it did attempt to celebrate, only one person is present, the speaker. Furthermore, the addressee is the speaker's inner, undisguised, and unreflecting self or, as Tate says in his self-protective discussion of this creation ("Narcissus as Narcissus"), solipsism incarnate. The representative modern of the poet's *Fugitive* works and of his first serious collection, *Mr. Pope and Other Poems* (1928), is the voice here. He has repented of his modernity and is therefore divisible, but to no real purpose. For, like the trifling admirer of Webster's Duchess

(though with more seriousness than that earlier mask), the young Southerner who comes on Confederate Memorial Day (hence, "rib-boned coats") to the gray hosts now at rest is incapable of penetrating the pastness of the past; nor can he read the order of men who lived it. All times for him are the same, in "verdurous anonymity." He sees the dead's reality only as they survive physically in the salt of the sea and the organic matter of the grass. Only the present is real, because only in it does he exist. Nevertheless, he wants to recover the dead, desires their instruction. He feels a lack in the formulations of scientific naturalism, at least enough of a lack to come interrogating. And intellectually he recognizes that the buried men arranged before him "row upon row" were, in temper and spirit, unlike himself in kind and degree. Though he knows, as a matter of record, the "arrogant circumstance" in which these soldiers went up to meet death gaily, he stumbles somewhere short of *experiencing* that knowledge. The "infantry" remains "inscrutable"; and the wise serpent, "sentinel of the grave who counts us all," is left to preside over unanswered questions inside the now "shut gate."

Meter and imagery open for us the best way into the design of this extraordinary poem. And since his skillful use of these particular tools is part of the grounding of Tate's reputation, some close consideration of them at their most polished is doubly called for. Autumnal figures weave their way throughout the entire poem. They are challenged by the allusion to heroism. But in the end, after some struggle, they (not a spoken notion or "idea") win out. The prosody echoes the shifts of advantage in the aforementioned conflict and points up its merely thematic implications with an evocative touch of drama. As the young Southerner argues with himself, he moves back and forth between two poles; when he approaches either one, Tate's measure breaks down and his tropes obliterate the discursive thread being spun out in meditation on the "inexhaustible bodies." Associated with the autumnal figures are fragments of other related sets of imagery. Wind, sea, and animal life provide three. They combine naturally with the refrain of blown leaves and are, in substance, its extension. The salt sea and animal life (crab, spider, hound bitch, jaguar) are part of the persona's

habitual reduction of himself into something less than fully human—like the reference to “a mummy in time.” As for wind, no power bespeaks mutability more unmistakably. In the imagery and in the firm regularity of line seventy-five through the conclusion we are most certainly readied for the penultimate questions:

What shall we say who have knowledge
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave
In the house?

Simultaneously, we are prepared for the omission of an answer. By metrics and metaphor we are made to foresee that knowledge here will be only knowledge of lack and knowledge of death, that the modernity of the earner/bearer is still sufficiently strong to preclude anything more satisfactory. Hence there must be (given the inceptual tension of the poem and the weight therein assigned to its respective antipodes) questions and no answer. And hence the serpent is left with the field which has been his private domain since man lost the way into another green place.

“To the Lacedemonians” reverses the strategy of its companion piece, the Confederate “Ode.”²⁰ In this poem the old soldier is the persona, and the moderns who have assembled to honor him and a few more of his kind left alive are present only by implication. Nonetheless, these silent participants in the scene are still the dead: ruined Southerners, less a presence—though alive and young (and in “gray,” for the occasion)—than the ancient veteran’s buried comrades. Tate has once more inverted his chosen genre. As the “Ode to the Confederate Dead” may be an allusion to Henry Timrod’s 1866 graveyard “Ode”—an allusion warped so as to reflect upon and warn the people for whom it was designed—so this memorial echoes Simonides’ famous Grecian epitaph for Leonidas of Sparta and his Three Hundred. The warrior in “To the Lacedemonians” has returned, after sixty-five years, to report (in 1932) to a city (the old capital, Richmond) that has not deserved the service rendered by his generation. But, for reasons that are made obvious in the course of the poem, he makes the report to himself and “to imaginary comrades.” No one else is available to

receive it. The circumstance is admittedly peculiar. But it is also potent, commanding. An honorable man such as this soldier preserves the forms, regardless of the gesture's futility. For he has the right to his own dignity and can in no other way secure it. It is thus that fatality is celebrated anew, with no word of remission but with much anger and greater authority than was possible from a young man who cannot find his way.

As so often before, once again images order and unify, with shifts in prosodic pace functioning in support. In a fashion suitable to a public poem written for one of the last Confederate reunions, Tate's persona looks backward as well as forward and to the present. And his standard for measuring all three is the norm for civility in whose name he had lost a leg at Bethel. There is no irony in Tate's use of this mask. But there is, I insist again, an outreach for power which he of himself could not command. The juxtaposition and the irony of the moment do his work for him, given his adopted viewpoint. The sequence of strophes in the monologue follows a pattern whose stages are marked by increasingly frequent and aggravated irregularities of measure and by a steady drift into metaphor. It builds as the old soldier moves, by association, toward his peroration: a figurative recapitulation of his earlier announcement that his secret is "Damnation." Judgment is to be expected in Dixie by reason of deficiencies in the vision of her younger sons, their infection with what Eric Voegelin calls "gnosticism": a "lust after immunity to pain," a collapse of the will to endure an assigned lot, and a uniformitarian passion for security, "a flimsy shell to put their weakness in"—the "rotten tree" of "Union."²¹ Their errors are a compound and extrapolation of follies examined in the persons of Tate's earlier masks/subjects, rejection of the terms of their tenure in the flesh and of the point of their history. Violent winds ("tempest" and "hurricane" which "blow as they list") and shifting sands objectify the chastening powers thus released. Motion, noise, monomania (or sightless seeing), economics, calculation, and machinery are the companions of these citizens of a universal Yankeedom: these "white" faces who, the speaker contends, must have been born "on a street corner" and are certainly not of his "father's house." Set against them are the "light on the hills"

and the "precincts of light" that belong to the honorably dead and soon-to-be-dead:

. . . we their servants, well-trained, gray-coated
And haired (both foot and horse) or in
The grave, them obey. . . .

With these latter tropes go the old music of "elegance" that issues from "skill of the interior mind," the talent which embodies the accommodation of man's nature and the rest of creation which we call civilization. Gathering up all these connections is the "raging tower" that looms over a "gone land, pouring a long cold wrath into the mind. . . ." Babel is the consequence of Cartesian rationalism, an inner curse which divides the speaker from his heirs as it denied historical imagination to the melancholy "new" Southerner in "Ode to the Confederate Dead."

There are, of course, social or political implications in this work and in many others written by Tate during the same period: political, that is, in so far as political philosophy, in the contemporary usage, is an extension and application of what has been heretofore identified in the language of philosophy as approaches to "Being" and "Knowing." Yet these thematic accretions are no superimposed productions of a separate "science" any more than Tate's tropology is something "tacked on to" his verse. They contain not plans for tinkering with the logically prior reality, but rather observations of its existence. This much is evident in such oblique and relatively dateless poems as "The Mediterranean" and "Aeneas at Washington."

In a memorial for William Faulkner, Tate echoes an argument which was, by then, a familiar part of his position: that every high culture conceives of itself in terms of a governing myth.²² Then he identifies the myth of his own people as a variant of one of the West's oldest, the Greco-Trojan. Plentiful concrete evidence in support of this theory exists in the work of Tate's Southern contemporaries—John Peale Bishop, Donald Davidson, Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and others. All line up against the Greeks, ancient *and* modern. But the strongest confirmation lies in his own poetry, his considerations of post-Roman rebuildings of

Priam's hearth place. Tate is assuredly the most Virgilian of modern poets. Like the majority of educated Southerners of his generation, he came into possession of the Mantuan very early. And he continued to take the property seriously. Nowhere did it serve him better than in "The Mediterranean."²³ For the imaginative occasion of that poem is a literal retracing of the steps of Virgil's hero, and its scene the place of Aeneas' first landing in Italy—a spot close to where the Tates and Ford Madox Ford had gone on picnic in the summer of 1932, during Tate's second visit abroad and after the term of his first Guggenheim fellowship.²⁴ Nevertheless, despite its force, the allusion, capped with the epigraph from the *Aeneid* (I, 241), is turned back upon the present with noiseless ease. History is ordered and encapsulated, as one would fill a picnic basket. Here there are no surface acerbities, no mockeries, and no surprising verbal ironies. With the *Aeneid* looming in the background, several related journeys receive simultaneous attention. Quiet or not, however, there is movement. Once more the modern speaks; but this time he is further along toward an overview of his dilemma. He *knows* what he is about and what he has experienced.

Briefly, the lyric organization of "The Mediterranean" is as follows: four quatrains of description from memory, with a fifth concluding on a question; then two and one-half stanzas of half-answers and expansions upon that question; and then a final quatrain and a half that look like a statement but are in fact all the answer a wise but still "unidentified" modern could supply. In afterthought, from the perspective of the poem's conclusion, we can see clearly that the passages of description with which it opens are deepening into metaphor even before the speaker asks:

What prophecy of eaten plates could landless
Wanderers fulfill by the ancient sea?

And with the same glance backward, we can readily identify the properties of the next twelve lines which, like that long opening description, confer authority upon and earn a hearing for the closing assertion:

We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!
Now, from the Gates of Hercules we flood

Westward, westward till the barbarous brine
Whelms us to the tired land where tasseling corn,
Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine
Rot on the vine: in that land were we born.

Not just Southern or United States history but the entire westward overseas expansion of European civilization is here in question. The enterprise is not viewed in a favorable light; rather, it takes on the character of a vaunting aggression against Being, its Author and arrangement—once perceived as an analogue of other “colonizations.” Westering (as Dante’s Ulysses defines it in Canto XXVI of *The Inferno* and Plato before him in the *Timaeus and Critias*) is the great Faustian venture of Renaissance man—a metaphysical gesture, not merely a geographical one. Atlantis or the Indies are merely fresh names for Eden recovered by craft, an evasion of the terms of our tenure in the world we ourselves corrupted. They embody our unwillingness to “earn” our way (with God’s help) into a better Paradise. But about the eastward voyage of the present-day successors of Anchises’ son there is a certain beneficence. Nature itself conspires toward its accomplishment, carrying forth the boat like a “willing slave” and then “giving” the “murmuring shore” as Tiber’s mouth was given Aeneas by Neptune. Confederation with the powers that “marshal” us all by “divine tactic,” and not bold seizure, is thus manifested. Upon that beach man and scene collaborate in conscious reenactment of the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, feasting and “devouring” the very “plates Aeneas bore” (*Aeneid*, VII, 109-127). In repetition of the pausing of their “live forefathers” and in “location” of the “blood” short of the “peaked margin of antiquity’s delay” (Gibraltar), the dead-in-life making this picnic share in the sustenance which keeps still vital the force of the dead Trojans’ example. Tate’s moderns (and they are by generation modern, though the speaker is a Southerner) at least “taste the famous age.” That something akin to a “usable past” has been acquired is proved well enough by the existence of the poem and its giving voice to one of a favored few who broke out of “time’s monotone” (i.e., determinism’s bondage). But tasting is all.

For there have been events, trips, which occurred in between the season of Aeneas and this summer's day.

New world man, as represented here, acknowledges a "secret need" to "be down by the breathing side of Ocean." But no "all night" taking of "that sweet land in" is possible. An earlier submission to the "stuffless [objectless, with nothing that exists to gratify it] rage" of "lust for power" precludes such satisfactions—the sins of his more immediate progenitors. Not content to "unman their blood" in a particular, imperfect place, they "cracked the hemispheres" and released the flood which bore them "beyond the known sea" to a "tired [from wasting itself] land." There (or wandering back from there) they remain "landless." For the gods had no part in their riding of the flood they themselves released. Where they were born, no wine is made; rather, grapes "rot on the vine" for lack of husbandry, lack of the sacramental respect which rightly belongs to all that grapes signify in the goodness of creation. Utopianism moved both Plato's Atlantians and Dante's Ulysses—moved them, in "lust for the infinite" of a private godhead, beyond their appointed sphere and to their destruction. Though no longer "steep" (i.e., frightening), the entrance to Atlantis (the medieval mountain of hell and outpost of the sunken mythic kingdom of the ancients) cannot be seized—nor "earth's paradise" represented in Aeneas' wineskin. Instead, its equivalent is momentarily created in a gesture of ontic resignation—the poem—with which the sorrows of the question/epigraph do indeed find "end" or "limit" (*finem*).

Above I argued that the speaker is both Aeneas' heir, a Southerner inside the Greco-Trojan myth, and a citizen of the "Union." We must recall "To the Lacedemonians": all now "are born Yankees." Why such is the case (and with what costs) is the theme of "Aeneas at Washington."²⁴ In that poem, though it contains the sentiments of Aeneas himself, the scene is again contemporary. Retrospection is the action, and the tone, despite the eminence of the speaker, modest in the extreme. Nonetheless, the voice projected is a self-assured one, securing its rectitude with a touch of self-parody and a sustained verbal ceremony. It is light at first, in redacting a familiar story (of Troy's fall and its pious aftermaths). Thus is established the character behind it along with his

frame of mind as he meditates the moment of his disillusion. Like its owner, it is "disinterested and [therefore] honorable"—*not* the product of private feelings. Usually the time is past, though it comes close to the present as the poem progresses. Only in lines twenty-eight through thirty is there a *now*:

Now I demand little. The singular passion
Abides its object and consumes desire
In the circling shadow of its appetite.

To restate, it takes some time and experience to enforce the truth that "domes" and "towers" (usual symbols of human pride), even when the gods help with their construction, cannot be put up once and for all. The "burners of Troy" are always at hand. And thus Aeneas, when considered in all his capacities, is really Europe, the West. What he is saying is that all of his fleeing to build and rebuild is now finished. The transplantation and the continuation of civilization built up organically (always the Southern view of "westerling") is at an end. What is worse, it has aborted in something more degrading than barbarians' fire. Washington, the last Troy (an allusion to the Romanism of the Southerners who conceived of and built the city) of his or his blood's making, has, in the *now*, as its governing presence the screech owl. And it is there only to announce decadence, to forecast what Hegel (and other savants before him) had it to augur, "consecutively dark." Moreover, he has seen his capital for what it is as he stood "stuck [arrested] in the wet mire. Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city." The filth is now synonymous with the place and the hero's situation, an objectification of the fate of all that he (or his) bore westward from the old places.

At this point the importance of the muted tone and past tense becomes apparent. Shouted jeremiads lose their hold on the attention. They repulse and offend the perhaps guilty reader or auditor and let him off with a little psychological rationalization concerning their source. On the other hand, a quiet prophecy of impending ruin from the very incarnation of our cultural tradition—an incarnation who is beyond his season of "hunger" and "calculation"—is irrefutable, definitive. And even that high level of authority is

enhanced when the conclusions are presented as the burden of a long and deliberate reflection, as arriving *after* his passions are cooled, after his emotional investment in (but not his view of) his career has been cancelled and he has ceased to put faith in "contrivance." There is no reason to take his rhetoric for rhetoric; instead, it "goes down straight," circumventing the instinctual barriers every one of us erect against the psychic aggression of open argument.

"Message from Abroad" is the meditation of another "placeless" exile.²⁶ As in "The Mediterranean" the speaker is an American overseas. But here the form is epistolary; and the addressee is specific, Tate's lifelong friend, the novelist, critic, and Agrarian, Andrew Lytle. Little masking occurs this time, save what comes from conversion into a cultural symbol. From Paris in November of 1929 (during the poet's first Guggenheim), this Southerner posits another epigraph and with it looks back in time to the "red-faced" founders of his heritage. From Paris he cannot "see" them. They are unavailable, as were the dead to the persona in the Confederate "Ode." This time, however, the temptation of a substitute for their imaginative recovery is the problem:

Provence

The Renaissance, the age of Pericles, each
A broad, rich-carpeted stair to pride
With manhood now the cost—they're easy to follow
For the ways taken are all notorious,
Lettèred, sculptured, and rhymed

Here, in Tate's steadiest meditative vein, the way of James and Joyce (the way followed by so many Americans in this decade) is rejected: aestheticism seen into and through. A few "centuries broken, divided up, and claimed" will not serve. These acquisitions are the momentary "tastes" hymned in the first Aeneas poem. With effort, we can seize them; with discipline, find our way into them. The trouble is they slip away, and nothing can come in behind, for they close the door to the way back to where their owner came from. And what is worse, they are not the memory of the blood, the recollection of tall men "leaning" in "strength" against a

"west pillar" ("west" here meaning not the seat of righteousness, but rather the Eldorado of worldly opportunity). The teller remarks that both sender and intended recipient "*have . . . seen at length*" [*italics mine*] his "shadow gliding, a long nigger . . . at his feet." The tense is once more important. For in the third division of the epistle it is announced by the exile/author that from Paris he now "cannot see" the "incorruptibles" of the will who looked beyond, defied the wilderness, and built the "cracked house" he had known at home. Return to America, it is implied, he must. Drifting in the cold sea and (spiritual) drowning or the greater emasculating perils of the already remarked aestheticism are the alternatives. The fathers are not idealized in these lines. Neither is the red-faced child of red-faced men reproached for having made his venture. But even with only "bent eaves" behind him to go on, the speaker must face up to what he is and begin to define himself there. History cannot be avoided. Rather, it must be built upon—an "out of date" anger understood, the "secret fate" known.

"Jubilo" expands (and Americanizes) the scope of "Aeneas at Washington" just as "Message from Abroad" localizes "The Mediterranean."²⁷ Yet its perspective is still Southern—or American *and* Southern (we recall, the disjunction of the two was never quite accomplished). As the legend of Troy reborn has often been the Southerner's instrument for grasping his spiritual antecedents and figuring forth the logic of his world, the antithetical Northern legend of the New Eden in the West (the Adamic dream of righteousness recouped and the Fall negated by travel) has often served as a definition of his antagonist. And if the purpose is satiric, no version of the latter serves so well as the Negro, the simplistic biblical recasting of abolitionist nostrums into a promise of a trouble- and toil-free world. "Jubilo" is the Southern Negroes' name for the day of this liberation," the manufactured beginning of the new kingdom of the *Revelation of St. John*; it is called by other names in other lands (the African "Uhuru," for instance), but is dreamt of by all men. Furthermore, it is (as habit and metaphor) especially vulnerable to comic and ironic treatment (see also Tate's "Ignis Fatuus," "The Meaning of Death," "The Meaning of Life," and "The Eagle"—all poems about the error of overreaching). The

defense of self by an attack upon a known other is a commonplace rhetorical ploy. Parody is its natural instrument; and for this work the old spiritual of the title is an excellent point of departure. However, as I have already implied, the target here is multiple, the madness imitated in widest commonality spread. The time of this poem's composition, we should remember, is during the early years of World War II. And in that period Tate's view of "the sharp North and declining West" took on definitive, saturnine contours. The illusion which took the runaways toward an imaginary Jordan by way of politics, war, or economics ("What Is a Traditional Society?" and "The New Provincialism") in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* has now possessed all of civilized society.²⁸ And their folly has come to a head in the global conflicts of the century. According to the poem everyone—not just freedmen and Yankees who "abolished" (Faulkner's word) them—is nowadays subsumed under the heading of millennialism. In replacement for the waters of life and ablution (the second most important figure in the poem) are the attractive and perfidious substitutes of machines caressed and concentration camp victims accounted for like stock in ledgers! Undeterred by the horror of these phenomena, the expectant "hopeful" host ignore the silence of the poet and promise the poverty-stricken and now-ignored scholar that his freedom from history—naturally, the cause of his troubles—will come: that more of what has degraded them will effect their release from ignominy. The fanciful vision fallen from the "shelves of sky" (perhaps reference to the Platonic *Ideas*) has cast a "beam in the mind's eye," plunged us into the cave of shadows where no real revelation can reach. Therefore, with our generation (and those immediately before ours) impervious to the signs round about us, the parodic voice here speaking subjects all modernity to the inflative abuse of stanzas two through six. The lines which follow these require full citation:

All our jubilant eyes are raised,
 Jubilo. Over the barbican
 On the great Day pure and dazed,
 Empty of heart the empty man
 Of the Day of Jubilo

Then for the Day of Jubilo
The patient bares his arm at dawn
To suck the blood's transfusing glow
And then when all the blood is gone
(For the Day of Jubilo)

Salt serum stays his arteries
Sly tide threading the ribs of sand,
Till his lost being dries, and cries
For that unspeakable salt land
Beyond the Day of Jubilo.

By shifting to a new image, turning back once more to the fundament, Tate has put together parts into a whole, gathered them in an essential summary of what is behind all this confused eschatology. Self-regard, blood-sucking, solipsism: these will bring the Jubilo that will come. The irony of the entire poem's praise of that bright "dawn" comes clear at a stroke. Jubilo will occur when all the blood is "plundered," a mere serum/substitute. About this corruption and concerning the manner in which the well-ruined but still-living persist in loving their own destruction, Tate has somewhat to say in other poems ("Sonnets of the Blood" and "Winter Mask," for example). The attitude fits the image employed. For once we take in excessive salt and neglect the salt-free water outside ourselves, then that pure water becomes potentially destructive of our changed organic composition. Therefore, in that condition, we crave (while we persist for a short time dead/alive) more salt. The "land" we long for in that condition will be all "salt" after Jubilo—after the hunger for the "great Day" has "dazed" and "emptied" every man. Restated, the argument (also put plainly in "The New Provincialism") is simple: the best way to hell on earth lies in the attempt to make of it a heaven.

Tate is not remote or quiet in these lines. The dry mock is far heavier than sarcasm. And, because the impact of the total poem is that of parody, we sense the praiser behind the exaggerated praise. Indeed, even as the tone of stanzas one through seven rises into something more somber in the lines just analyzed, their point is at the same time hammered home. After the late Thirties Tate sustained his ironies with greater and greater system, reached

further and further beyond the brief lyric and dramatic monologue, tied his original images to some literary or historic reference. He at times wrote almost traditional verse satire. "Jubilo" (like "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air," "False Nightmare," and "Eclogue of a Liberal and a Poet") is a case in point. Along with its system of metaphor there is a regularity of measure and the unifying effect of the five-line stanza. Moreover, the formality of its structure is secured by its refrain—a refrain which is a direct lift from the title epigraph and its source.

"Last Days of Alice" does not, as regards chronology, fit the order of this discussion; for it was written in the early Thirties.²⁹ Yet despite its absolute lack of historic reference, it condenses so much of the manner and matter of Tate's poems of this "middle period" and so well anticipates his struggle with religious questions in *The Winter Sea* and later work, that I have chosen to consider it here. To imagine what would have befallen Lewis Carroll's sharp-tongued, priggish little miss had she been caught eternally in Looking-Glass House and Wonderland is another avenue for approaching the "Gnostic," positivist, or Atlantian mentality *in extremis*: of viewing it through a case specific and generic. Both the arrangement and the imagery of "Last Days" are extremely subtle, and its conclusion brings a new ingredient into the Tate canon that much puzzled early readers. Before examining these elements of design, I quote the poem entire:

Alice grown lazy, mammoth but not fat,
Declines upon her lost and twilight age;
Above in the dozing leaves the grinning cat
Quivers forever with his abstract rage:

Whatever light swayed on the perilous gate
Forever sways, nor will the arching grass,
Caught when the world clattered, undulate
In the deep suspension of the looking-glass.

Bright Alice! always pondering to gloze
The spoiled cruelty she had meant to say
Gazes learnedly down her airy nose
At nothing, nothing thinking all the day.

Turned absent-minded by infinity
She cannot move unless her double move,
The All-Alice of the world's entity
Smashed in the anger of her hopeless love,

Love for herself who, as an earthly twain,
Pouted to join her two in a sweet one;
No more the second lips to kiss in vain
The first she broke, plunged through the glass alone—

Alone to the weight of impassivity,
Incest of spirit, theorem of desire,
Without will as chalky cliffs by the sea,
Empty as the bodiless flesh of fire:

All space, that heaven is a dayless night,
A nightless day driven by perfect lust
For vacancy, in which her bored eyesight
Stares at the drowsy cubes of human dust.

—We too back to the world shall never pass
Through the shattered door, a dumb shade-harried
 crowd
Being all infinite, function depth and mass
Without figure, a mathematical shroud

Hurled at the air—blesséd without sin!
O God of our flesh, return us to Your wrath,
Let us be evil could we enter in
Your grace, and falter on the stony path!

The reasoning we must follow to read these lines is strict and complex. Tate's "cruel" Alice has declined well into twilight (a favorite time for the actions of Tate poems). We can infer that she has been a while in the kingdom of egomania and abstraction by the poet's description of her present condition. For her no reality exists but self: all Being (entity) equals Alice. Hence, due to the interval that has elapsed since her inceptual error, she has become "mammoth," but is not "fat." All our expectations in *Through the Looking Glass* are, we recall, reversed. Oxymoron (bodiless flesh) is the natural there and hence not ironic. Moreover, as I have already noted, there is no escape from the place of confinement after it has been entered, as in this case, by violence. Neither is there

movement—only more and more “swelling up” on the insubstantial food of narcissism, the food that troubled Tate’s Alice in the first place. The link between the two worlds, the division of the two Alices, shadow and self, has been destroyed. And, we must remember, a broken reflector cannot perform its magic, cannot provide the egress/ingress of the reflection the original Alice lavished her love upon. With no Alice in front of the glass, the “sweet one” of combination girl/shade behind it is pinioned in infinity—where there is no real (i.e., measurable) space, time, or other evidence of contingency; no incest but of spirit, no desire but of theory. Yet there is a death in Wonderland, a death more monstrous than any visited upon ordinary flesh—an abstract aftermath with human dust in “cubes” and a shroud “mathematical.” Where there is no day or night, no salvation or judgment, impassivity weighs heavy. And that perfection is assuredly more terrible than God’s wrath levied upon poor sinners as they stumble along the hard way of ordinary life. For (according to doctrine) wrath produces penitence and may thus open up a way for grace. But in the damnation (for unforgivable sin) behind the glass, none of these terms apply. What is not bound (infinite) cannot err and cannot without action solicit grace.

At this point the meaning of Tate’s closing prayer, set just before his direct address, his inclusion of us with Alice, becomes very clear—and very potent. Still, however, it surprises. Modern poets do not sue deaf heaven with bootless cries. Nonetheless, there was more of the same to follow from Tate, more that proceeded inexorably from this plea “spun off” by inertia from his always incipiently religious critique of modernity. And this “more” confirms (not alters) the unchanging character of his performance as poet. That completion of what was already complete is the concern of my final remarks on selections from his verse.

Though the poet in 1950 contended that the agony of unbelief was the theme of the body of his production to that date, the religious note first becomes unmistakable in Tate’s poetry over a decade earlier in “Sonnets at Christmas” and in the Alice poem just read. Because I do not find the Christmas pieces to be entirely successful (and because another point of departure is in better ac-

cord with the emphasis of this essay), I shall commence elsewhere. "The Cross" is an unavoidable challenge for the serious student of Tate's poetry.³⁰ The poem looks toward conversion but proceeds from (albeit unwilling, respectful) unbelief. It reads as follows:

There is a place that some men know,
I cannot see the whole of it
Nor how I came there. Long ago
Flame burst out of a secret pit
Crushing the world with such a light
The day-sky fell to moonless black,
The kingly sun to hateful night
For those, once seeing, turning back:
For love so hates mortality
Which is the providence of life
She will not let it blessed be
But curses it with mortal strife,
Until beside the blinding rood
Within that world-destroying pit
—Like young wolves that have tasted blood—
Of death, men taste no more of it.
So blind, in so severe a place
(All life before in the black grave)
The last alternatives they face
Of life, without the life to save,
Being from all salvation weaned—
A stag charged both at heel and head:
Who would come back is turned a fiend
Instructed by the fiery dead.

The curious quality of "The Cross" comes of its remote contemplation of orthodoxy. The poem continues Tate's iteration of the theme of death—all kinds of death. It concludes with a dilemma only a little less dreadful than the dull misery of the "black grave," of the excessive love of life (the reverse side of the hatred of mortality, the desire to cancel that portion of natural "providence" or fortune) in which it opens. They who would come back from the "secret pit" of God's burial and Resurrection (and perhaps also of hell's harrowing) are more of Tate's living dead, caught in spirit with the fiends even before the body has gone to earth (*Inferno*, Canto XXXIII); and those who tarry on the brink, beneath the rood, are (as the speaker sees matters) at once there and forever dis-

abused of dreams of mortal immortality (hence "from all salvation weaned"): at one time fearful of turning away, yet still incapable of faith, of accepting the "light." Therefore the image of the stag at bay. Apart from these "last alternatives" of difficult faith and the night of a hopeless clinging to the flesh, there is only frozen despair: and either choice is final. True enough, the pit and the rood should reconcile men to dying (mortality) as blood reconciles young wolves to killing. (The reference to blood is not casual; without it there is no remission.) But we are not told that the reconciliation is likely; and wolves are rather negative counterparts for cleansed sinners. All that the speaker can report with certainty is that men come to this "sticking place" in blindness, that the confrontation is "severe," and that he "cannot see the whole of it." A familiar error is in the process confounded: comprehension of the truth does not always result in action based on that comprehension; sin and error are two different things. The voice addressing us in "The Cross" is not in error; but, modern that he must be, he is still, by his own announcement, uneasily in sin. Hope for him exists because he has not yet seen the spot "some men know." However, the conjunction is not remote. For he is "there" and has also begun to see. Soon or late, choose he must. From that buried assumption proceeds the verbal texture and the structure of the poem.

More certain and authoritative are Tate's later doctrinal poems—perhaps as a result of his adoption, by slow stages, of the Roman Catholic faith in the late Forties. Once he even goes so far as to invoke the "didactic laurel" ("The Maimed Man"). Still, even when proceeding from authority made great by long practice and greater by the truth of revelation, there is an emphasis on the drama of unbelief caught in the toils of a variety of "escapist" (non-submissive) ideologies. "Winter Mask: To the Memory of W. B. Yeats" is an illustration of this process. Inevitably it calls to mind Auden's elegy for the same master. However, Tate's poem is the better of the two—is indeed one of his finest, impressive at least in part by reason of the Southern poet's "approach" to orthodoxy.

"Winter Mask" is another poem written in war—in a season when all the miscalculations of modernity are discovered in their consequences, in the cataclysms of mass suicide.¹¹ Tate couples the

familiar twilight/winter images (for the West it is toward nightfall and decay) with the death of the great Irish poet because World War II began just at the time of Yeats's passing—and because he, like the shade he (while saluting) interrogates, is concerned with what should be the poet's part in an Age of Iron: with how the times might be redeemed through the truthful presentation of their image. The question very much exercised Tate's imagination in these years—was the subject of several poems, including "False Nightmare" and "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air," and was a subsidiary concern of "The Maimed Man." The opening stanza of this very regular, sober, and authoritative poem announces openly that he has put the matter to himself:

Toward nightfall when the wind
Tries the eaves and casements
(A winter wind of the mind
Long gathering its will)
I lay the mind's contents
Bare, as upon a table,
And ask, in a time of war,
Whether there is still
To a mind frivolously dull
Anything worth living for.

Next comes what the older rhetoricians called the *exordium*, the affectation of modesty or calculated self-effacement. With these lines Tate separates himself from his authority and preserves the appearance of drama in a poetry proceeding from well-settled assumptions. The voice which calls itself "dull" and a "poor sacrifice" (i.e., to the attempt at seeing "through" and not just "with" the eye) functions like a persona in fronting the damned eyes of its own kind, the eyes so far gone in perversity that they cherish it and disregard all that comes after ("heir").

Stanza three begins the mask proper, the set of images that sum up the malaise of our age as would the tableau and set pieces of the old-fashioned dramatic medium they together resemble. The first of these looks back toward the self-devouring futurists of "Jubilo," the bloodsuckers whose proper food, once they are confirmed in their destructive habit, is available only in a "Death Val-

ley." But Tate's poisoned rat has gone beyond loving his blind "dryness." He is driven by a need for cold drink, even though he cannot safely quaff it. Doomed before he heads toward the water of life, he comes upon it in the wrong condition and sips ruin where he (belatedly) senses release. For an analogue to the rodent surrogate, Tate turns to Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XXXII) and the intaking of another artificial sustenance.

Both damned in eternal ice,
The traitor become the boor
Who had led his friend to slaughter,
Now bites his head—not nice,
The food that he lives for.

Stanza four labels these figures as "bestiaries"; yet with still more feigned (and ironic) modesty, another spiritually unhealthy reason for being is brought forward: the "Sylvan door" is opened and "nature . . . bought/ In rational proration/ As a thing worth living for" is considered in the round. The purchase, however, proves similarly unsatisfactory (stanza five), an uneven trade for the soul: another mode of self-destruction. In romanticizing the natural world, we (Western man since the nineteenth century) have all forgotten that it survives through agony, that it feeds what it feeds upon. Like Prufrock, we have wet our hair with only fog for the sheltering of our thereafter extra-vulnerable person (a sort of *manqué* baptism). This bemusement is the equivalent of Henry Fleming's in *The Red Badge of Courage*, especially in the moments after he has fled the battle; and the counter to it with which the stanza concludes is also reminiscent of Crane's check upon myopia: symbolically situated human remains far gone in dissolution. The crows that bear "Nature to their hanged brother" in pecking his mouth are, with that ironic act, communicating to him the truth of their common condition—all the more ironically because it is the mouth image that binds the stanza to the rest of the ingestion in the poem and explains the much quieter trope of exposure that precedes it. They are like their prototypes, the Harpies in Dante (*Inferno*, Canto XIII), who "gnaw" their instruction into the bodies of other self-destroyers hanging on a "bole." A more than

sacramental view of the creation (a submission to contingency so total as to deny man's mixed composition) is the cross Tate's romantic corpse had chosen for his rationale. It stands in this place in the order of his poem because its attractions are more seductive than the grosser sins detailed a little earlier—and perhaps because it recalls the ultimate cost of all human error upon another tree. The former are, however, rejected with some detachment (“... not nice,/The food that he lives for.”); the penultimate confusion receives sharper handling.

In the process of the four stanzas of deliberation, the tension of this poem heightens rapidly, leaving behind the suggestion that the question of the first ten lines will not abide any ordinary answers. In the last stanza of “Winter Mask,” Tate is well prepared to address Yeats directly.

I asked the master Yeats
Whose great style could not tell
Why it is man hates
His own salvation,
Prefers the way to hell,
And finds his last safety
In the self-made curse that bore
Him towards damnation:
The drowned undrowned by the sea,
The sea worth living for.

The water image is returned—and the reference to drowning, its pessimistic correlative. The sea does not “mean” any one thing in the verse of Allen Tate, though his uses of it are all traditional enough. This time it is “worth living for” (i.e., as the communion of creation in its source or, once more perhaps, the church). Back again also is the curse of the man-made hell, the by now familiar “vertical” rebellion and concomitant hunger for new dispensations: the turning away from “pit” and “rood” to the example of the “fiery dead.” This is no obvious answer to the problem of the total poem. Yet read again. Yeats's style “cannot tell” why we misbehave, even though it be “great” (i.e., moral) in tending to its business; nonetheless, those undrowned in this final sea are, in their own way, swallowed up in its opposite. Thus there is an

answer, a response which the poet can best render dramatically. But poetry, of itself, is not it.

One theologian has argued that ontological error is the besetting sin of our age; a simpler term is "pride." Tate and most of his Southern contemporaries seem to agree; they *mean* all their dark metaphors. To contend that it will not do to expect of poetry, Nature, or worldly schemes the "peace that passeth understanding," while at the same time asserting, in a meditative context, that such peace exists—this was Tate's intent, in one fashion before 1944, often in another thereafter. But always, whether he recognized it or not, his intent.

There are several other Tate poems which could, as well as these, effectively open the way of the "uninitiated" reader into his canon, but none which combine so naturally to serve that purpose in an essay of this length. "Seasons of the Soul" (his most ambitious poem, and the masterpiece of his mature style) would have left little space for the other, less difficult, and more typical works. I refer the industrious to R. K. Meiners' *The Last Alternatives* and add only that "Seasons" is a *via* in the medieval sense, a "guide for the lost"—an expansion upon the initiation motif of "Wolves," "The Swimmers," and other productions already considered.² The same holds true for "Sonnets of the Blood," various "poems of allusion," and the translation/imitations—fine verses and clear enough for those who comprehend the argument advanced above. What I most regret is my inability to find a place for certain other short lyrics (especially those concerned with human love), for a full discussion of Tate's use of parody, and for the conversation pieces. But I have introduced my subject as coherently as was possible in this compass, referring to the essays by way of parentheses where they illuminate the poetic practice. I have not considered other Tate criticism in detail because Tate insisted that he should be taken primarily as a poet ("The Unliteral Imagination"). Since his version of this role is a consciously traditional one, a version engendered by the "Southern mode of the imagination" discussed in certain of his essays and in Donald Davidson's "Why the Modern South Has a Great Literature," some notation of his poetics has been necessary. His interest in that subject (as opposed

to criticism in general, the indiscriminate reading of literature) has been too consistent to disregard. And also needful in view of what we know of this craftsman's habits of composition was the calculated formality of the foregoing exegetical series (see Tate's interview in the *Shenandoah* of Spring, 1961). He has "built" his poems, beginning often with the final or central lines, then preparing an introduction or matrix to set off that beginning. To read his verses we must, therefore, *recompose* them for ourselves.

What remains at this point is a moment for Tate's fiction and a glance at his social essays. With these concerns answered I shall conclude with a summary of his adult life and a final assessment of his professional stature.

Perhaps the best way to approach *The Fathers* (1938), Tate's single published novel and, with the exception of two short stories, his only prose fiction, is through the Agrarian documents—particularly his two Plutarchian biographies." To grasp the dialectic of the book, any reader habituated in the now received or "national" view of ante-bellum Southern "wickedness" must, perforce, divest himself of such impedimenta and acquire, at least for a time, another version of the complicated "prologue to 1861." But after "learning" Virginia as it was just before secession and finding there a language suited to the translation of design into the terms of exposition, the same reader (or his equally politicized Southern counterpart) should put "history" to the back of his mind and then consider form: the structural resemblance of the novel to many Tate lyrics. For the aesthetic and therefore the epistemology illustrated in *The Fathers* is one with the theory behind the poems. By mentioning a few points of congruence, I can document the analogy.

First of all, the old order is rendered, not reported, in *The Fathers*; and in that rendering are projected as well the forces, internal and external, that brought on the collapse of the old South. The narrator is not Tate, but rather a "fallible narrator"—a fictional persona. All that occurs in the unfolding of the book is gathered upon the single figure of Lacy Buchan, who is, as an elderly man, recalling experiences from his youth which have never quite come into focus for him. Lacy is a partial modern, torn between his

old style, Unionist planter father, Major Buchan of Pleasant Hill, and his fortuitously Confederate merchant brother-in-law, George Posey of Georgetown. Other figures dot these pages, some of them more normative (like Lacy's Cousin John). They, however, count for little, except insofar as they bear upon the principals. And they in turn live only in the first person before us. Even as he tells the story, after forty years, Lacy cannot finally choose between his antithetical preoccupations: cannot, even though he senses that he must and why. Tate's novel conforms with what he says of all the better contemporary fiction: it is "symbolic naturalism," not of an action at all but rather of a mentality displayed as it confronts the world. That the times in Lacy should be our concern is specified beyond doubt in the final paragraph of *The Fathers*. For there the tense is present; and the struggle begun with his mother's death, the family's removal to Alexandria, and their subsequent return home at the War's commencement (the central events of the book's three divisions) is sustained and completed: "I love him [George] more than I love any man" [italics mine].

There is a great deal of irony in this announcement—and reason for despair. Everything and everyone (including the fascinating George himself) warn this scion of a great house against the abyss that is personality, the destruction that is his brother-in-law. Lacy is not so deracinated as his spiritual successor among the rebellious dead; but again unlike that Southerner of a latter day, this voice "knows" his ancestors, proves his sense of the quality of their life with comment and then is vouchsafed a vision of his grandfather which confirms his credentials as one of the fully initiate. The wonder is, of course, that he refuses it, ignores the apparition's equation of Posey and the Jason of the Fleece, and insists in stubborn modernism on the irrelevance of the dead. All of value that the Major personifies dies with him, save a few memories and pangs of conscience. Those that he leaves behind all eventually realize, in greater and lesser degrees, that the world is marvelously diminished in his passing. But if the wise persist in madness, love their own damnation, what can come of fools? So much for the mood of *The Fathers*. Like so many of the poems, it is an apocalypse. Yet that should not surprise. Tate was admittedly not sanguine

about the character of our times. He put his faith in something other than history.

Of Tate's social and political essays I recommend several as glosses on his verse and criticism. I have already made reference to "The New Provincialism." Also important are his papers in the Agrarian manifesto ("Remarks on the Southern Religion") and in *Who Owns America?*, a sequel ("Notes on Liberty and Property"); as are the often cited "Religion and the Intellectuals," "Christ and the Unicorn," "A Traditionalist Looks at Liberalism," and "Appomattox, April 9, 1865: A Peroration a Hundred Years After."³⁴ Other evidences of the conscious intelligence and severe sense of craft which went into the creation of Tate's art appear in the critical commentary gathered in *Essays of Four Decades* (1968) and *Memoirs and Opinions: 1926-1974* (1975).³⁵ Tate's narrative and expository prose is graceful, informal, disarming, and incisive; his argument tends to be arch, quiet, and devastating. Throughout his career he observed a discipline in everything that he made—achieved and maintained a sense of control, a lightness of touch. To the end of his life (February 9, 1979) he continued to write and to participate in the cultural life of his country. From the early Thirties and his first appointment at Southwestern College in Memphis, he had been a teacher—much of the time in the North. And he continued in that vocation even while combining it with other activities which reflect the priorities of the man of letters: as holder of the Library of Congress Chair in Poetry, 1943-1944; as editor of the *Sewanee Review*, 1944-1946; as winner of the Bollingen Prize, the Brandeis Medal, the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and other awards; and, finally, as president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, 1968-1969. In 1968, having retired from the English faculty of the University of Minnesota (where he had enjoyed some establishment since 1961), Tate ceased his wanderings and built for himself, his wife (the former Helen Heinz) and sons a home on the grounds of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Toward the end, he returned to Nashville, completing his journey in the section of his native region where his career had begun. He had come full circle. Thinking of Tate's influence on a generation of American writers,

his friend Donald Davidson wrote what will serve for Tate's epitaph. Davidson imagines him situated in a high place, surrounded by disciples and admirers who have come

Where the battle is and a lonelier kildee's cry
Exultant with your verses to unlearn
The bondage of their dead time's sophistry;
They know, by Mississippi, Thames, or Seine,
What city we build, what land we dream to save,
What art and wisdom are the part of men
And are your music, gallant and grave.³⁶

NOTES

1. "Emblems" appears on pp. 142-143 of Tate's *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970). An English edition under the same title was published in the same year by the Oxford University Press. The latest collection of Tate's poetry is *Selected Poems, 1923-1976* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, Inc., 1977).

2. Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930).

3. Allen Tate, *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow, 1968), pp. 517-534; 577-592.

4. Louise Cowan, *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959); Professor Rock's dissertation was completed at the University of Minnesota in 1961.

5. *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 424-446.

6. Tate's "Horatian Epode to the Duchess of Malfi" appears on p. 75 of *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*.

7. *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 401-423.

8. "The Unliteral Imagination: Or, I Too Dislike It," *Southern Review*, I (Summer, 1965), 530-542.

9. *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Random House, 1957).

10. *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, p. 120.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

13. *Poems: 1928-1931* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); *The Mediterranean and Other Poems* (New York: Alcestis Press, 1936); *Selected Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).

14. "Mr. Pope," *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, p. 125.

15. *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 17-29.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 593-607; 141-154.

17. "Literature as Knowledge" appears on pp. 72-105 of *Essays of Four Decades*; "Tension

in Poetry" on pp. 56-71 of the same collection.

18. *Stonewall Jackson, the Good Soldier: A Narrative* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1928); *Jefferson Davis, His Rise and Fall: A Biographical Narrative* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1929).

19. *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, pp. 17-20.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16. See Donald Davidson, "The Meaning of War: A Note on Allen Tate's 'To the Lacedemonians,'" *Southern Review*, I (Summer, 1965), 720-730.

21. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics & Gnosticism* (Chicago: The Henry Regnery Company, 1968); Allen Tate, "Mere Literature and the Lost Traveler," *Poetry*, 135 (November, 1979), 93-102.

22. "William Faulkner," *Sewanee Review*, LXXI (Winter, 1963), 160-164.

23. *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, pp. 3-4.

24. On the occasion of this picnic see Radcliffe Squires, *Allen Tate: A Literary Biography* (New York: Pegasus, 1971), p. 118.

25. *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, pp. 5-6.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

28. *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 547-557 and 535-546.

29. *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems*, pp. 107-108.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 68-70.

32. R. K. Meiners, *The Last Alternatives: A Study of the Works of Allen Tate* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1962).

33. *The Fathers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1938).

34. "Remarks on Southern Religion" appears on pp. 155-175 of *I'll Take My Stand*; "Notes on Liberty and Property" is printed on pp. 80-93 of *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), edited by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate; "Religion and the Intellectuals" was published in the *Partisan Review*, XVII (March, 1950), 250-253; "Christ and the Unicorn," *Sewanee Review*, LXIII (Spring, 1955), 175-181; "A Traditionalist Looks at Liberalism" came out in *Southern Review*, I (Spring, 1936), 731-744; "Appomattox, April 9, 1865: A Peroration a Hundred Years After" was published in *Spectator*, IX (April, 1965), 467-468.

35. Allen Tate, *Memoirs and Opinions: 1926-1974* (Chicago: Swallow, 1975). Some of his finest critical commentary appears in his published correspondence; see John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974).

36. The quotation is from "Lines Written for Allen Tate on His Sixtieth Anniversary," pp. 15-16 of Donald Davidson's *Poems: 1922-1961* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).

A Durable Fire: Donald Davidson and the Profession of Letters

It may well be argued that no one person has had a greater part in the development of a profession of letters in the twentieth-century South than has Donald Davidson. William Faulkner (because of the galvanizing effect of his success on young Southerners who would in other times have stifled their desire to write, because of what he did for the status of the writer in his region) and John Crowe Ransom (in that he was his younger friend and fellow Tennessean's teacher and precursor) are reasonable exceptions to this generalization. There are no others. Moreover, though Davidson's career was by deliberate choice of greatest significance to his own people, it has on its merit and through the recognition of the Southern Renaissance which it helped engender, nourish, define, and call to the world's attention reached beyond sectional confines in numberless ways and instances. Davidson's impact, past, present, and continuing, is evident in the work of scores of essayists in opinion, historians, poets, critics, writers of fiction (teachers and/or makers of literature and keepers of the tradition of which literature makes a major part) who came to Nashville or Vermont (Breadloaf) to study with him: coequal debtors to the correlative companies that availed themselves of his tireless

courtesy in seeking his advice and direction outside of an "official" academic framework or simply observed and were moved to follow his precept and example as it leapt up at them from the printed page or out upon them from the platform and *required* their emulation. With those who knew him, Davidson was not an influence according to the ordinary usage of that word (*i.e.*, Pound on Eliot and Yeats, Howells on Twain, James on Wharton, Emerson on Thoreau, or even Coleridge on Wordsworth). For his ministry was, in its purchase and steady hold, too personal to be described so baldly, even in cases where there was no sustained private communication or direct tutelage between source and recipient. Nowadays the transmission is quite often unconscious, long delayed or reluctantly accepted. Or, even more likely, it is left—for reasons of policy or "prudence"—an open secret. (Davidson never was "inside" the national literary Establishment, was not, as are some of his Southern friends, a good patron for the aspirant to a member's seat in that select company.) Donald Davidson died in 1968 at the age of 74, but the moral authority of the committed master who acted out of his total self, of the many-sided man who was in all his occupations one, remains *and* is felt, whether it is acknowledged or denied. With friends and not, in the creation and direction of taste, in the basic disciplines of rhetoric and composition as well as in the study of the dynamics of culture, poetics, politics, literary genre, and literary history, Davidson continues to be the invisible presence presiding over public class and sequestered writing desk. His service in these roles began early and was, among friends of his own generation, especially with the related groups of Fugitives and Agrarians operating out of Vanderbilt in the Twenties and Thirties, unquestioned. Moreover, if we can believe the evidence provided by addresses, quotations, replies, echoes, and dedications—and above all the testimony of the high seriousness and craftsmanship which continues to inspirit the careers he has touched and turned—its outreach persists: in the words of one of the poet's favorite spokesmen, Joe Clisby, sparks from "a durable fire" that "will stay."

A general assessment and placing of Davidson is overdue. Fortunately the university presses of Vanderbilt and Minnesota, in

Donald Davidson: An Essay and a Bibliography and *Donald Davidson, Poems: 1922-1961*, have provided us some of the tools necessary to the task.¹ With such an assessment in mind, the two volumes may most appropriately be considered together. The book by Thomas Daniel Young and M. Thomas Inge contains a critical study of the making of "Lee in the Mountains," Davidson's most famous poem, as well as a record of what in forty years and more he gave us with his pen. The other is a collection of the poetry that he will in the long run be best remembered for, the "immortal part" that will survive time's ravage. Both books were very much needed, for the mass of Davidson's publication is so various and the inter-relatedness of all of his handiwork so absolute as to befuddle and impede the labors of even the most energetic student of the shape and stature of his achievement. And the poetry, much of it out of print or not easily available, is the key to both.

The painstaking bibliography, which runs through 1964, lists fourteen books, one hundred two essays or articles, and the separate publication of poems—to say nothing of hundreds of reviews, scores of them essay length. Publications after 1964 include: papers on Tate, Dos Passos, and Edmund Wilson; a collection of and introduction to the work of his friend and fellow Agrarian John Donald Wade;² an edition of a Simms novel and an introduction to Richard Weaver's long awaited exposition of the "Southern mind." In pausing before this persistence in a chosen role and considering the proof it gives us of the character that went into the choice, however much we may draw back in astonishment and admiration at this performance of Davidson the scholar, apologist, historian, critic, and teacher, the final collection of his poems raises the issue of how much his engagement with the times, loyalty to good friends and good causes may have cost us in verse he might have written. Or so it seems! For if the poetry of Davidson is the key to all else that he accomplished, the choice of the harvest, it is equally true that the prose is the best available introduction to *Poems: 1922-61*—and an indication that the two activities fed into each other to the advantage of both. Had Donald Davidson the artist put away Donald Davidson the citizen, teacher, kinsman, soldier, and scholar, forgotten the "unuttered vows" made—in

person or imagination—on a Bedford County hillside (“The Hermitage”) and retired to a Tennessee version of Thoor Ballylee to “clutch” after Yeats’s “abstract bird” or pursue the phantom of the aesthetic Absolute, his creation would have been something very different and, in the writer’s view, less valuable or commanding than what is contained in this collection.

The questions, sometimes only implicit, considered in almost everything Donald Davidson wrote are, first of all, “Where am I?” (Where are we?) and then, “What shall I [we] do?” The context in which the questions are asked, the source of the answers and the idiom of their expression and resolution, is historical: not merely of written history (now usually nothing more than a defense of the present disposition of things or special pleading for extension of “current trends”) but rather of memory, a more viable inheritance accessible, as Louise Cowan has well put it, “through communion and pietas.” The poet is the peculiar custodian of that memory—and its transmitter. In his possession as images are events, men, and scenes around which have gathered the associations that define his circumstance as a civilized man of a particular culture and faith living in a particular time. His glance is backward and outward, not forward and inward. Language, prosody, metaphor, the features of genre, the formal properties of his craft are not simply the appropriate vehicles for the requisite transaction, the passing on. They are themselves part of what must be remembered, preserved, and reproduced. Poetic variation, experiment, if functional, must be grounded in a full and intimate possession of all four.³ Otherwise the discovery of permanence in flux, the universal in the particular, the linking together of the life of generations present, past, and yet unborn (which the poet as memory keeper should be about even when his eye is turned toward the face of his own era) is impossible. Otherwise there is no transaction, communion, poet and audience—no impregnability to the attacks of science or purchase upon the indifference of the insensible and blasé. Out of the long struggle of humankind’s argument with the recalcitrant body of the world, the patterns and machinery of the art of poetry have emerged; and in the nature of man itself hidden beneath the apparent variety of the struggle do they have their seat

of authority. If the poet permits himself to be intimidated by this or that variety of "mere opinion" (in Plato's sense) or "closet speculation" (in Burke's) masquerading as fact, the "folk-chain" is broken and he either joins the Alice of Allen Tate ("The Last Days of Alice") in "incest of spirit" behind the looking glass or else is reduced to playing esoteric games for the amusement of the illuminati. To go that way, Davidson contends, is to be no poet, in the strict sense of the word, at all ("Poetry As Tradition"). However, he never forgets the responsibility which goes with the place. Neither will he resign into privacy nor imitate without the redeeming "word" the roilings of an unhappy era devoid of

Myth that is truest memory,
Prophecy that is poetry.

Therefore his manner and his matter always stand in close relation to what T. S. Eliot defined long ago as "the tradition," inside it even when innovating. His is a *mimesis* not in surface particulars but in essence and character, *as* not of *what* the elders did. To quote Mrs. Cowan once more, he subjected his imagination "to the actual life of his people"—not of just the South but of that stream of Western culture of which the South has been one of the latest depositories. He kept the memory, flesh and spirit—the "fable" which to lose is death—wherefore he answers the questions.⁴

But none of this is to say that Davidson ever misconceives of the time he lives in or the audience he addresses. Though he does not fall into the self-defeating and, given his purposes, degrading snares that lie along the path followed by devotees of "the guarded style," his own strategies are usually quite contemporary, quite objective, and calculated to circumvent the modern reader's well developed suspicion of the direct adjuration or straightforward narrative, his resistance to the poet as memory keeper. As he remarked to his lifelong friends in one of their recorded conversations at Vanderbilt, "against the lyrical dramatic" poem, even if it has a referent in history, there is no "argument." The most common situation in his poems is that of dialogue or its like (*i.e.*, interior monologue)—a projection of the very act of calling back and handing down the knowledge of

What city we build, what land we dream to save,
What art and wisdom are the part of men.

Knowledge that

Redeems us from the evening shade
With light too absolute to fade.

Woven into that dialogue, the repository of that light, are those images that render such exchanges (in the now fashionable parlance) archetypal; that may be, if in their fullness received, a means of restoring the poet to his people and his people to the Word.

Of the forty-three poems (not counting the many-sectioned "The Tall Men") printed in the Minnesota collection, over two-thirds contain elements of dialogue or monologue, dramatic and/or interior. Some are verse epistles ("The Ninth Part of Speech") or mixtures of epistle and ode or other lyric forms ("Gradual of the Northern Summer," "Lines Written for Allen Tate on His Sixtieth Anniversary," "Woodlands, 1956-1960," "The Last Rider," etc.). Others are straight dialogues or demidramas: "Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar," "The Case of Motorman 17: Commitment Proceedings," "A Barren Look," and "Soldier and Son." "Sanctuary" and "Old Sailor's Choice" are dramatic monologues of the strict variety; and "Randall, My Son" a ballad in its tension and tragedy but somewhere between meditative lyric and monologue in form, as is "Spoken at a Castle Gate." All these poems have about them a marked objectivity, a tendency to engage the reader with a place and a human action, usually in an evocative context of allusion, and then to let the two together work their way with him. Moreover, even though its length, its relation to the author, and the way in which its parts are self-contained and yet interconnected make of the total work a special problem, what can be said of these forty-three is also true of each portion of "The Tall Men." But nowhere is the collective character of Davidson's poetry better revealed than in his grave interior monologue, "Lee in the Mountains." In it many of the themes and much of the theory of poetry which he worked with throughout his career are condensed and given their most memorable and satisfying expression. It is an in-

evitable point of reference for discussion of his total poetic production; and now, thanks to the study of its manuscript tradition by Young and Inge, it is the Davidson poem the composition of which we know most about. Furthermore, as their excellent essay demonstrates, every change that the poet made in revision of this work moved it in the direction of greater and greater impersonality, symmetry, and *progression d'effet*.

The speaker in (and subject of) "Lee in the Mountains" is Robert E. Lee in his last years, as president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, Virginia: the "silent" Lee to whom the poet has as much if not more right than the chronicler. The setting is the walkway from Lee's home to the college chapel and the old soldier's office therein. The time is 1867, '68, or '69. The action is, apart from its inception, internalized—a train of thought as it passes through the mind of the former Confederate general in a moment of crisis and choice. While awaiting the hour for morning service, Lee looks backward into his, the Lees', and the South's past and outward at the present prospects of the buried nation of which he is the ex-officio patriarch/chieftain. The burden of his meditation is, as historians would agree was the burden of the *known* Robert E. Lee, duty—or the difficulty and appropriate method for resolving several varieties thereof. With this combination in the paradigmatic image of Lee's inner struggle (predictably attractive to the embattled traditionalist of today whose condition is somewhat analogous—seemingly disarmed and compassed about with enemies), Davidson's poem begins. In the summer of 1933, he wrote sixty-one lines, posing both of the questions which, as is argued above, are the substance of a great many of his poems. Young and Inge reproduce this draft (pp. 8-12). As they rightly observe, into this beginning are incorporated all the concerns that occupied Davidson's thinking in the preceding year of study and writing: the misfortunes of his people, the tactics presently necessary to the defense of their integrity; the calculated distortion of that misfortune by the present day Ministers of Truth, summed up in the transformation of the "General Lee to whom the unreconstructed Old South gave its fierce devotion" into the "gentle Lee of the New South myth";⁶ the

value that a representation of Lee persisting in his duty to his countrymen by serving them in the most suitable role left open to him by conditions in the post-bellum South (perpetuating his kind) might have in providing them with a "usable past"—a past in which they together might know their "better, . . . wished-for selves." Obviously Davidson "had a firm conception of the materials he would use in the entire poem before he began the actual process of composition" (Young and Inge, p. 43). The extension of the poem, the framing and answering of the questions in a second draft, indicates that he worked in one direction throughout. Draft two, done in the fall of 1933, contains one hundred thirty lines. It takes up the dynamic of the emotionally charged first effort at a poem (roughly equivalent to the first eighty lines of the finished work)—the turning from recapitulation of present difficulties and imperatives to reaffirmation of older obligations and from thence to self-accusation, despair, and the thought of further recourse to arms—and runs forward the suggestion of mountain valley setting and pre-chapel hour into a full desecularization of Lee's problem. Place, time, personality, present occupation, and pending business of Lee go together in making up the dialectic of which the final issue is the address Lee rehearses in preparation for his daily morning worship with his charges, as the summoning bell rings above him:

It is not the bugle now, or the long roll beating.
The simple stroke of a chapel bell forbids
The hurtling dream, recalls the lonely mind.
Young men, the God of your fathers is a just
And merciful God Who in this blood once shed
On your green altars measures out all days,
And measures out the grace
Whereby alone we live;
And in His might He waits,
Brooding within the certitude of time,
To bring this lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave,
To fruit upon the mountains whither we flee,
Never forsaking, never denying
His children and His children's children forever
Unto all generations of the faithful heart.

Duty to the living (i.e., the young men of the college) and duty to the dead (Henry Lee, whose memoirs he is editing, and the "way" of the family), to heirs and forebears, are here put in their place. As was "surrender" before it, impiety—the excessive trust in the strength of moral wills and arms to which the magnanimous man is naturally prone—is now rejected. Neither the justice of any course of action nor the principle of resistance to aggression is involved. In the preparation of a preface to his father's book, Lee has been made freshly aware of a continuum in the history of his kindred, of the Virginia he will not forswear. This book will have to speak for him, politically and militarily. Anything more would be a war cry, not an apologia; and Lee doubts the timeliness of such a "kindling word." But the chapel beneath the mountain's shadow is no place to speak of these matters, and the college boys (representatives of all his people who await from him directions as to what they must do, how to "persevere—to maintain their integrity and self-respect and their belief in the virtues of the society that produced them" [Young and Inge, p. 40]) no fitting audience. The coming ceremony will be appropriate for submission, not to the Leviathan, but to God. The example, confirmed by a life's experience, must be set; the essence of the memory, religion, preserved. This is the first of duties. What is of primary importance if the anguish of despair is to be assuaged and the yoke of bondage cast off is (as in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*) that the Covenant, the working agreement between man, Nature, and their Proprietor, be kept; that the South remain in character, continue to keep its pledge without falling into the psychology of its enemies while contending with them. The passivity of the patron saint of genteel Southern liberals, the make-believe Lee, and the "hurtling dream" of their overlords, the Prometheans who imagine that they can force the world into whatever form they desire (again the Faulkner parallel, pride and humility)—if repudiated will leave open the channels of "grace," and as the Book (Psalm 121) teaches us to expect from the proximity of mountains, "deliverance." By removing it from a narrow personal or even a communal context, Lee settles and transcends

his debate with himself. The declaration of this well-earned "knowledge carried to the heart" will in its recommendation to the "sons" (who may be expected to "keep it still" [l. 32]) honor all his duties.

Davidson never made major emendations in this section of "Lee in the Mountains." But once he had finished it, a serious problem, affecting the entire work, remained: the verisimilitude of its beginning. The poet did not confront it until prompted by comments and advice from his friends Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon. The result of their exchange, reproduced and ably discussed by Young and Inge (pp. 28-41), was his fifth and (apart from a few small modifications) final draft.

In January of 1934, Davidson sent Tate a version of his new poem. It was returned to him in a few days with the kind of detailed comment which always made their association (and that of others among the Fugitives) so fruitful in a professional as well as a personal sense. Tate's chief editorial suggestion had to do with the opening lines: "far too pat and abrupt . . . oratorical, almost set." His counsel was to "make it dramatic," substitute "a more halting introduction to the theme, as if from the scattered images of a moment a line of meditation took hold and went through to its end." He insisted that an alteration at the start would strengthen the whole incalculably. And he added in a postscript that his wife (Caroline Gordon) believed a brief interpolation or break in the form, a few remarks to the group standing by (perhaps set in parentheses) could serve (pp. 37-38). Davidson did not follow all the suggestions made by the Tates but he did break the paragraph and interpolate the passage of conversation. Along with the physical details of the scene ("ruined" locusts; "rocky path, where steps decay/ . . . paint cracks and grass eats on the stone"), the inclusion of these lines (5-8) gives a psychological plausibility to all that follows:

Walking into the shadows, walking alone
Where the sun falls through the ruined boughs of locusts
Up to the president's office. . . .
Hearing the voices

Whisper, *Hush, it is General Lee!* And strangely
 Hearing my own voice say, *Good morning, boys.*
 (*Don't get up. You are early. It is long*
Before the bell. You will have long to wait
On these cold steps. . . .)

The young have time to wait.

But soldiers' faces under their tossing flags
 Lift no more by any road or field,
 And I am spent with old wars and new sorrow.
 Walking the rocky path, where steps decay
 And the paint cracks and grass eats on the stone.
 It is not General Lee, young men. . . .
 It is Robert Lee in a dark civilian suit who walks,
 An outlaw fumbling for the latch, a voice
 Commanding in a dream where no flag flies.

"Bell," "wait," and the formal salutation which precedes them are the triggers which in this casual exchange (on path, before chapel in which services are to be held and Henry Lee's *Memoirs* are to be edited) drive Lee's mind to the question of his duty. At first his thoughts contain only the scene itself and his figure walking; what metaphoric possibilities figure and scene embody remain potential. But then other people enter, men to whom the old soldier stands in a special relation. The words spoken by these students (some recently in the Army of Northern Virginia), who respond to Lee's approach with the respect and title they and the rest of the South insist he retain—"General" still, though the war be lost—and the words he speaks to them are the catalyst which sets in motion his reassessment of and wrestling with his position. They can "wait." He, though old, must now move on and strive to forestall the decay of the world he lived only to defend—a decay objectified by the appearance of the landscape. Soon the "bell" (a foreshadowing of the events and the thinking which will round off his reflection) will summon him to act again the chieftain's part, to surrender himself to his place. As "an outlaw," he must wear a "dark civilian suit" and still "command" though "no flag flies." He must walk "alone" and "into the shadows." It now becomes obvious that the opening lines are themselves most suggestive. The overhung and "rocky" path is a variant of the trope to which Davidson has been most powerfully drawn—that of the pilgrim on the "long

street" of a mechanized wasteland; "into shadows" refers to the nearness of death for a man of Lee's years and health, or to the ever more ominous direction being taken by Federal policy toward the South. And his "commanding" can be only "a dream" of the mind and spirit, now that "tossing flags" are furled. "Bells," with its religious overtones, becomes the focus of all these details. For the faithful they toll not only the knell, but also (by augury, after the speaker's agony in the chapel study with the "fortune of the Lees" spread before him) the promise of resurrection; and when joined to "General," "father" and "mountains," the word binds together a network of associations we can believe Lee might have followed. In these seventeen lines as they appear after the fourth revision, Lee and the "pilgrimage" he performs are well established in the reader's mind; with them the "line of meditation" takes hold. What history provided, the shaping power of the submitted imagination has converted into a speaking picture that resists pacification and emasculation. "Lee on duty," thus projected, demands a hearing, an engagement—not a distant, condescending admiration.

The opening lines of "Lee in the Mountains" are, in their use of the combination of human figure and setting to anticipate and define an occurrence, similar to a number of Davidson's shorter poems. Extended reference to documented "public" history is, in fact, not so frequent in Davidson's poetry. Instead, most often a scene, an image of arrangements or events in Nature takes over or is made the subject of discussion ("On Culleoka Road," "The Horde," "A Touch of Snow," "Wild Game," "Apple and Mile," "A Barren Look," "Woodlands, 1956-1960"). He is never indifferent to analogies between human life and the larger patterns it moves within. Indeed, part of the theme of the Lee poem is that man should not think of himself as utterly apart from Nature: that, of man's dwellings, "God loves best where he unimproves" because that which is "steep," "straight," and "narrow" inhibits in man the congenital self-delusion. And the same holds true of its companion piece, "Sanctuary" (another transmission poem, father to son, this time concerned with what is to be done when the necessity for resistance to the barbarian is no longer debatable), and the more recent "The Nervous Man." In "Sanctuary," the speaker, as did

Lee, looks upward to the mountains in trust. He is comforted more by the repose they will offer the spirit of his descendants than by their tactical value as a fortress. To "keep the freehold" is to come to some accommodation with and to develop some feeling of stewardship over the rest of creation. Orientation, frame of mind, is once more given greater importance than the choice of one or another course of action within it. Streams, forests, valleys, the earth ("waiting" beneath an asphalt disguise), the heavens, the habits of animals, and the cycle of the seasons—all, as well as mountains, speak of man's middle estate and the wisdom of

. . . the ancient rule
That tame abstract must wed the wild particular.

The poem from which these lines are taken, "The Ninth Part of Speech," salutes a house and its owner (Louis Zahner, a teacher in a New England preparatory school and Davidson's colleague at Breadloaf) who keeps that law. So do the celebrants in "Gradual of the Northern Summer," the ritualist hunters in "Second Harvest," the visitors to Simms's plantation in "Woodlands, 1956-1960," and the "singers" in the Tennessee country graveyard in "Joe Clisby's Song." And we may say the same of the subjects of Davidson's memorable essays, "The Sacred Harp in the Land of Eden" and "Still Rebels, Still Yankees."⁸ All listen for some equivalent of "the old horn's husky music" or "hollow gourds foretelling" ("Randall, My Son"; "Aunt Maria and the Gourds") and watch for "stars . . . that course the telltale night" or "*his* great dust in the valley" ("A Touch of Snow"; "Sanctuary"). What they hear and see is, it is true, often ominous. How could it be otherwise? To be a traditional poet now is to be of Jeremiah's fellowship. But these images pull two ways. Art that is apocalyptic is also by refraction restorative. The strategy, especially when the appeal to authority is directed to Nature, is the counterpart of what Paul Fussell has defined as "elegiac action." This process is represented in the Davidson canon by "Last Charge," "From the Chimney Corner," "Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar," "Hermitage," the memorial essays on various friends, and *The Tennessee* (the history of the great river valley).

Both procedures "belong" and function in Davidson's work because they are not for him mere devices, means to an end. But a third, an inversion of the other two, works—given his objectives as memory keeper—even better.

Consideration of the new ikons of his civilization (made by men who neither "listen" nor "look") as set against artifacts from its predecessor or against pockets of the "speaking" Nature that an older culture felt no compulsion to improve exercises a heretofore little noted facet of Davidson's imagination: the satiric. What he draws from this combination is a devastating portrait of a latter day City of Dreadful Night. Acerbity and dry mock are appropriate responses to its more trivial excretions. But darker sayings are reserved for the more serious. Davidson's "long street" runs somewhere! And in his satiric poems that somewhere is usually megalopolis. On it travel automobiles. Along it stand monotonous suburban warrens and inhumanely impersonal towers (railroad stations, seats of government, "up-to-date" churches, schools, other cultural "gestures," factories, and places of business) as well as a few older buildings and monuments that contradict all the shining accoutrements of the "self-sufficient finitude." People walk the street and inhabit the buildings. Most of them seem to belong there. Yet a pall hangs over the whole. An uneasiness of foreboding, a suspicion (to borrow Faulkner's words once more) that "the people who have destroyed [their land] will accomplish its revenge," troubles this Nashville-like Babylon. A vanity greater than even the proudest Athenian would have contemplated has been undertaken beneath "western skies"—and with results. Yet Nimrod's tower was tall. Despite good engineering:

The shudder in the nerves must ever vex
Trim certainties of the vast complex,
And ever the wildcat's scream
Must break the Platonic dream. . . .

Davidson's satiric diagnosis of a "dead time's sophistry" is to the same end as his work in other veins, his searching of history and Nature for "analogues." Urban images of "aimless motion" and "traffic-led" men, of "soot," and "bribes" reared up "against fate"

operate with telling effect. They hammer home the ironic negation which informs poems such as "On a Replica of the Parthenon," "Twilight on Union Street," "The Last Rider," "At the Station," "The Nervous Man," certain essays (*vide* "Some Day, in Old Charleston") and much other less specifically satiric writing—particularly "The Tall Men."

"The Tall Men," Davidson's longest poem—almost two thousand lines—appears at the end of the Minnesota collection. The placement of this suite is, like the arrangement of its nine components, not in the least casual. There is in the poem a beginning, a complication, and a conclusion. The unfolding of a consciousness (and a conscience) is rendered with almost as much power as in "Lee in the Mountains"; and even that great monologue is not of more importance to an understanding of his career. All of Davidson's "voices" work together in this construction. The inevitable tropes of seasons and elements, earth and sky, loom in the background; a history stretching back into the twilight of prehistory is called up and recreated and a modern present is set up against both. The speaker (more a representative Southerner than a self-portrait—at once like Davidson *and* representative because there is nothing about his problems or the sensibility he exposes to them that is to the intended audience special, "peculiarly *his*") is compelled to consider his identity and his duty by a variety of forces competing in his mind: above all, his recent military experience; his marriage; and his troubled awareness of the disparity between his heritage and his present circumstance. In the objectification of his young Tennessean's self-consideration, Davidson came into his artistic majority. For when he forthrightly asks the two questions ("Where am I?" and "What shall I do?") so often discoverable in his later verse, he has subjected except for rare moments the Romantic muse of his Fugitive days.

"The Tall Men" is too complex a poem to be examined thoroughly in this space. It can be approached from several directions. The making of it was of decisive importance to Davidson. There may be no better exploration of the problems that confronted the young Southerner of his generation (born in the years just before or just after the end of the century), but because intensity

and anguish or a special kind of privacy sometimes overcharges or shortcircuits, it is uneven in spots. Yet he had to write it before he could make more formally polished poems. It stands in relation to the rest of his career as do *The Prelude* and kindred creations to Wordsworth's—as an assessment of the author's right to be the poet he intends to be. Or perhaps a better analogy is to Eliot, to *The Waste Land*, against which it has most perceptively been measured by Marion Montgomery.⁹ As Montgomery argues, what flaws "The Tall Men" also makes it a stronger work than Eliot's. Because Davidson's persona "believes" in history as a record of choices, he takes the risk of commitment. The result is moral and dramatic richness, not, as with Eliot's self-pitying speaker, stasis disguised by mummified folklore and learned apparatus. He is a believable person from an actual community; therefore his tentative decisions count for "something"—tentative because intellectual uncertainty and a determination to act in character despite it are to be expected from the son of "tall men." Davidson is too honest to let his young man find complete answers without showing him as having lived for years with less final directives, without giving him time to work these up out of the portions of "the fable" that he knows (Scriptural, classical, and Saxon—the poetry of which is everywhere just beneath the surface in this poem). He ends with as much inquiry as he begins. But, driven by his long journey away from what he knows and is known by ("The Faring") and by combat (like Davidson's as an officer in the 324th Infantry, 81st Division, in the 1918 struggles in northeastern France), by glimmerings of unrest about his world before he left for battle (the title section, "The Sod of Battlefields" and "The Geography of the Brain") and even deeper postwar disillusion with it on his return ("Conversation in a Bedroom"), he has at the moment when the Epilogue ("Fire on Belmont Street") is near its end, discovered the context in which he will seek to resolve his moral and spiritual uncertainties ("The Breaking Mould") and build his future ("Epithalamion"). Even stronger, however, than such experience is the "blood knowledge" which it rekindles, the knowledge which belongs naturally to the pious son. Again, the poem's most important (and concluding) image is of father and son, this time of the speaker's

memory of a boyhood visit to an Indian burial ground. The years conjured up in earlier sections of the poem stand between the speaking present and remembered past. All together provide the perspective needed for the vision-haunted modern Tennessean to perceive his age and place as part of a continuum. Though the fire may fall and "consume" the symbolic city, the old paths to

Where water is and the slow peace of time

are yet discoverable. Through memory it is possible to get off the long street by traveling on it. The burden here is as plain as in briefer poems. From 1927 on, Davidson continued to give it body and voice. The lines from "Chevy Chase" with which he introduces "The Tall Men" in *Poems: 1922-1961* are meant as seriously as his metaphors. Once headed, he was not to be deterred by man "of a woman born."

Readers of *Lee in the Mountains*¹⁰ will regret the omission from this last collection of many fine poems published during Davidson's middle years: the vigorous narrative, "The Running of Streight"; "Assembly at Murfreesboro"; "Sequel of Appomattox"; and particularly, "The Deserter: A Christmas Eclogue." But he will be pleased to discover that Davidson chose to include in this volume, as he did in *The Long Street*,¹¹ a few surprises—some of the Fugitive pieces and others drawn from his first volume, *An Outland Piper*.¹² What he gathered in *Poems: 1922-1961* is certainly enough to represent his stage by stage emergence as an unusual poet and artist of considerable stature. Of these stages the last is the most interesting and will require a few concluding comments and some illustration.

After 1938, perhaps in reaction to oversimplifications concerning the nature and purpose of his art which the volume of that year and his earlier verse and prose had called forth, Davidson wrote far less but, both in form and execution of intent, far more successful and less easily categorized poetry. The texture of his verse grew more and more certain and dignified; his mastery of tonal modulation, metaphor, and inversions of style more complete. All stridency disappeared and was replaced by an unbroken poise as he came into the fullest possession of the resources of his craft. Even the prosody of his verses (always felicitous) and the command of the

dynamics of particular genres seem to have drawn sustenance from this corrective intent. Also, and more importantly, his subject matter changed. Or rather, to speculate a bit, he shifted to related but foreign versions of the same matter in order to protect all of his work, past and in progress, from distortion, oversimplified enthusiasm, and stupidity. Rarely in the late poems is there a positive connection (narrative, meditative, and/or dramatic) with the War Between the States. The New England poems, of course, belong to these years. They will repay the most systematic formal explication, as will the near-Pindaric "Meditation on Literary Fame" (probably for John Crowe Ransom—complete with praise of distant forebears, laurels for the victor, honor to the god's participation, plus summary conclusion) and the closely related "Lines Written for Allen Tate on His Sixtieth Anniversary." Both of these highly formal poems reach far beyond American shores for their action-defining referents. The analogy of Virgil, to the many rebuildings of Troy (Tate's own favorite), is invoked for what is now undertaken "by Mississippi, Thames, or Seine." True enough, an objector to this generalization can point to "Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar" and "Soldier and Son" as a Southerner's poems. But he may readily be confounded. In the first, the time is recent and the real issue not the Southern speaker's piety but the isolation of his antagonists from *their* history; and the other contains no specification as to a particular war or side. "Woodlands, 1956-1960" is in verbal texture, setting, and theme the most Southern of Davidson's later poems. But it is so in such a subtle fashion (like Mr. Ransom's "Old Mansion," another tribute to a "house") that the reader who becomes automatically irate or unreflectively pious in reading "Lee in the Mountains" or "The Tall Men" has no more idea of how to object to or praise it than he does of how to read Simms's novels.

What Southern reference that otherwise appears in Davidson's *The Long Street* collection is exceeding brief. And when allusion does occur, its object (as were references to classical literature, English verse through the Renaissance, European history, and Scripture in the earlier poetry) is to recall to the reader the "bigger fable" of which the subject matter immediately before him makes only a fractional part. Keeping context, keeping alive the memory (in a

body of images and narratives) which is tradition—these, we should recall, are the *vatic* poet's duty. If focus on the near at hand causes his reader to misunderstand or resist him, if he encounters Tate's "New Provincialism" (in time), the thing to do is to look further afield.

The best of these late poems are, however, the two lengthy contemporary recastings of stories borrowed from Greek literature: "The Case of Motorman 17: Commitment Proceedings" and "Old Sailor's Choice." They spell out by going as far beyond the Southern scene as is imaginable just how much Davidson intends by "tradition." In them we might say that his people's history and the urban visage of the "New South" changed places, reversed roles (allusion and events modified by allusion), with the synthesis of biblical and pagan/classical material always together in his mind. He turns to the ancient prototypes of "the fable" not only because they protect his more recent discoveries of its truth from simple political response at the practical level but also because the legends he selects (from Aeschylus and Homer) are, after much tawdry manhandling, in need of refurbishing. Davidson's Nashville *Eumenides* perhaps had its *fons et origo* in a mysterious fire that broke out in 1929 on a streetcar running out into the West End of that city. The event was connected in some "unenlightened" minds with the doings of Tennessee's redoubtable "Bell Witch." Another obvious source is the puerile optimism of the modern "social" church. And a third is the *a priori* judgments of the contemporary American bench. But, if it so began, this drama/dialogue developed far beyond its ground. For in the abuse of good Orestes (Everyman) Brown, kinsman and streetcar conductor, by a judge and citizenry who are determined to deny him a hearing and to lock him away, there are more folks implicated than were ever troubled by the Clarksville revenant, lulled into a complacent nap by an "uplift" sermon, or discomfited by sociological jurisprudence. What inspired the updating of Book XII of *The Odyssey* (except for what Joyce had done to its hero) I cannot guess. Both poems, however, give a scathing rebuke to the presumptuous anticulture into which their originals have been transported. They read well together. "Old Sailor's Choice" (in reworking Homer a little—

changing the time and the cause of death of Odysseus' crew) should leave the would-be builders of the New Jerusalem (in Tennessee or elsewhere) uneasy enough. "The Case of Motorman 17: Commitment Proceedings" changes little and is, if anything, even more appalling than the Juvenalian nightmare of "Fire on Belmont Street." But, as Davidson's epigraph (*Eumenides*, ll. 517-18) suggests, fear is a proper gift for vain fools. Nothing else will profit those who "would eat the Oxen of the Sun" or forget "the family trouble, old as the years are old," forestall the Furies and cheat Charybdis.

Perhaps I have inappropriately devoted too much of this essay to the difficulties of Davidson with his times. Much of this I thought necessary because of the kind of poet he chose to be and the dilemmas with which his choice confronted him. Too much analogy between prose and poetry may nonetheless mislead. To the apocalyptic poet there is another side, little suggested in his smittings of the heathen. His existence presupposes that there is grace in judgment or forebodings thereof—love in correction. If it was difficult to be Donald Davidson, the memory keeper, we should not imagine that he expected it to be otherwise. Even though we may refer to his "strategy" and despite the fact that something of that skill went into his poetry and that skill's idiom serves in the performance of the necessary sacrilege of exposition upon it, the poet Davidson was not essentially a rhetorician. He waited for his effects and did not come before men as a mere persuader. He hoped to accomplish much (because he had "supporters"), but not quickly. Human reason alone was not his target. This is a truth that no one who has read Davidson's criticism or otherwise profited from his instruction is likely to unlearn. Yet he did not submit to the propositions that the poet's effort would be fruitless or that a "trend" constituted an inevitability. His is a durable fire. For he had assurance from of old that

. . . if Orpheus bleed
His singing head
Will drift on the stream
To redeem men
Till poetry
And justice come again
Unless the world be dead.

NOTES

1. Thomas Daniel Young and M. Thomas Inge, *Donald Davidson: An Essay and a Bibliography* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965); *Donald Davidson, Poems: 1922-1961* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).
2. John Donald Wade, *Selected Essays and Other Writings* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966).
3. Donald Davidson, *Southern Writers in the Modern World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), pp. 22-23.
4. The quotation is drawn from Louise Cowan's "Donald Davidson: The 'Long Street'," p. 105 of *Reality and Myth: Essays in American Literature in Memory of Richmond Croom Beatty*, eds. William E. Walker and Robert L. Welker (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1964). On Davidson's poetry, see also Thomas Daniel Young and M. Thomas Inge, *Donald Davidson* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971); and Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Wary Fugitives: Four Poets and the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).
5. Rob Roy Purdy, ed., *The Fugitives' Reunion: Conversations at Vanderbilt, May 3-5, 1956* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959), p. 62.
6. Donald Davidson, *Still Rebels, Still Yankees* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954), p. 156.
7. Donald Davidson, *The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), p. 227.
8. *Still Rebels, Still Yankees*, pp. 137-151; 231-253.
9. Marion Montgomery, "Bells for John Stewart's Burden," *Georgia Review*, XX (Summer, 1966), 145-181.
10. Donald Davidson, *Lee in the Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938).
11. Donald Davidson, *The Long Street* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961).
12. Donald Davidson, *An Outland Piper* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924).

Ransom and the Elegiac: Self-Expression, Social Purpose, and Poetic Form

Despite the sophistication of his aesthetics, John Crowe Ransom was in many respects a very old-fashioned poet. He did not care for imagism or other "pure" manifestations of the art. And for the Romantic notion of poetry as "expression," he indicated even less enthusiasm.¹ In his view the aesthetic artifact, though not "practical" like the "economic forms" of "plough, table, book, biscuit, machine and . . . such processes as shepherding the flock, building, baking, making war," is also not "trifling," and performs a function within the *res publica* which is unique and indispensable.² The ancient and inherited forms of poetry are in fact part of the larger pattern of prescription which binds together a traditional society: indeed, they are the identifying characteristics of such a society. They are the means by which civilized man "transforms instinctive experience into aesthetic experience"—manners, rites and arts.³ And they are in and of themselves at least in some measure civil, religious and graceful, making us "capable of something better than the stupidity of appetitive or economic life."⁴ Hence, in Ransom's conception, ". . . a natural affiliation binds together the gentleman, the religious man, and the artist—punctilious characters, all of them, in their formalism."⁵ Ransom did not come

to this position in emulation of T. S. Eliot. A more likely source is his thorough knowledge of classical letters, where the origin of poetic forms in some recognizable social purpose, designed to control and ritualize some recurring human occasion, is always acknowledged. In Ransom's hand, the old teaching was elastic, and in no relation to the opposite extreme from literary "purity," mere moralism, "Platonic" or Puritan—terms of opprobrium in this Tennessean's lexicon. For the complexity which results from an ironic reflection he had an open preference. Yet he could write at eighty, in contrasting his art with the idiom of religion, that "... a less hortatory form of persuasion, yet a powerful and rhetorical one, is poetry."⁶ His notion of the poet's business was less dramatic and more declamatory and musical than that of his pupil and friend Allen Tate—with distinctive results in his own inimitable verse.

The lyrics of John Crowe Ransom display a considerable mastery of a wide variety of techniques and tones. His craftsmanship, it would appear, was equal to any subject. But to one theme or subject he was particularly drawn; in his own words, "... the great subject of poetry, the most serious subject, is death. . . ." A death (or the prospect of a death) is the occasion of almost one-third of the poems he chose to reprint: the "Grizzled Baron" has recently visited "Emily Hardcastle, Spinster" at the time of the poem to which she gives her name; as a "gentleman in a dustcoat trying," death approaches a "lady young in beauty" in "Piazza Piece"; he has lately "shorn" the "old tree" of a Virginia family of its last green branch in "Dead Boy"; in "Necrological" he has puzzled a monk with a battlefield strewn with corpses; in "Janet Waking" he has attempted to "instruct" a child in "how deep/ . . . [is his] forgetful kingdom" by bereaving her of a pet hen.⁸ This list could readily be extended. Mr. Ransom has approached death from all directions, has made thematic use of it in several contexts. But the most serious treatment of this most serious of themes belongs to the distinctive species of death poem: the elegy. Ransom has given us at least one. It is not by accident that he (a classicist and a careful student of genre) often, when reading his verse publicly, discussed the importance of the theme of death in his poetry with a few remarks about "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter."

This Ransom poem is, as its title suggests, a miniature but highly traditional elegy. The five quatrains follow, as a structure, the three-stage progression which is a convention of the genre: from statement or indication of occasion of grief to expression of grief and from thence to reconciliation to or transcendence of grief. And, again in accordance with the convention, the concluding consolation is developed directly and organically out of the context established by the reactions to the girl's death which immediately precede it.

The opening quatrain, because the title of the poem relieves it of the obligation of stating the occasion of the elegy, the death of Mr. Whiteside's daughter, is free to be very specific about what there is in her death that "astonishes us all"—about the singular implications of this particular death which cause it to affront the speaker's sense of order, justice, and propriety:

There was such speed in her little body,
And such lightness in her footfall,
It is no wonder that her brown study
Astonishes us all.

The recollections of the child's vivacity and grace which make the stillness and abstracted or vacuous appearance of her dead body disturbing, identified in these verses as the provocation of grief, are presented fully in the three following quatrains which make up the second section of the poem. Together, in the language of high chivalric romance, they validate the explanation of collective sorrow far more effectively than could any exclamatory lamentation or full-throated Miltonic remonstrance against harsh fate. For the substance of human grief at the loss of those beloved is memory; and the most natural thing to remember about a dead child when in the presence of its mortal remains is the seemingly "tireless heart" with which it once conducted the petty affairs (in the language of the romances, "wars") of its life. The image of quest or knightly conflict suggested by the idiom Ransom applies to the remembered adventures of the little "goose girl" is likewise appropriate to the function of this section of the poem as the second and lamentary division of a three-part elegiac structure. According

to the conventions of the elegy, it is not at all indecorous to express grief at the death of the subject *through* a recitation of his adventures, a recitation which will normally stress those qualities which he revealed in life that make of his death a loss to those who mourn.¹⁰ Ransom's evocation of "wars . . . bruited in our high window," of "arms" taken against "shadows" and "lazy geese," is gently ironic—his acknowledgment that he has adjusted his form to the necessities of his poetic situation. The fantasies which children enact in anticipation or imitation of the business of adult life may amuse us as we observe them; they can but play at making war. But these fantasies take on a different (and in this case, suitable) coloring when remembered in so funereal a context as that given them by this poem.

The word "ready" in the first line of stanza five marks it as the climax of an elegiac sequence: "Now go the bells and we are ready. . . ." In stanza one the speaker declares that the gathered mourners are "astonished" at the death of John Whiteside's daughter. In stanzas two, three, and four we are made to understand why. But the placement of line seventeen of the poem forces us to look at its first four quatrains and to ask how they explain the "readiness" of the bereaved, who were before "astonished" and "unready," to ask what has changed their mood and prepared them to complete the obsequies for which they have gathered; it raises the question of how sorrow at death may be assuaged by forceful expression of that selfsame grief. And, at the same time, it forces us to recognize in the structure of the entire poem the pattern of the traditional elegy.

At first glance, the announcement—without prelude or explanation—that those gathered in bereavement are now prepared for the last rites is surprising. The movement from section two to section three in the elegiac pattern appears to be, in the case of "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," forced and poetically unearned. But on re-examination from the perspective afforded us by line seventeen, Ransom's strategy in embodying consolation in the raw material of grief itself becomes apparent. The dead girl put the mourners in mind of the girl alive; and the contrast between the two, which serves first to explain what is astonishing about the

child's corpse, comes then in immemorial fashion to offer what is perhaps the oldest and most natural of all consolations, that provided by the changed and "uninhabited" appearance of the corpse. The "brown study" propped before the mourners is not recognizable as the "tireless . . . little lady with rod." Whatever vitality and grace were earlier "bruted" in the "high window" of this now diminished household will not answer with its members the summons of these bells.

Or, to take "ready" another way, and to explain in accordance with pagan or classical practice the consolation offered by memory to those gathered before a child's body, special significance may be attached to the "Alas" (line twelve) of the geese harried by the "little lady," to the "rod" with which she "took arms" and disturbed their "apple dreams," and to the general description of her activities while yet alive as a conflict with "her shadow" (lines six and seven).

In the classical elegy the question of an afterlife does not usually arise; reactions to bereavement are conditioned by emphasis upon the naturalness of death, its part in the great cycle of life from which all good and fruitfulness are derived. Always nature as order, as life-giving and inevitable, is affirmed.

The geese, after the fashion of animals in the ballads, may have been preternaturally wise in seeing an ill omen in Miss Whiteside's contention with shadows. No good can come of "such speed" and "lightness," such an excessive struggle with providentially imposed limitations. Death is the issue to be expected. No Platonic "wand" can provide mere mortals with the transcendence of their condition which their hearts desire. Only sorrow can result from its employment. If the rehearsal of the child's life that makes her still body "astonish" be understood according to the ominous emphasis here given certain words in the three middle stanzas of "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," the structural placement and the "ready" of that poem's fifth stanza (and therefore its total design) still give us no problem.

In the interview in *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* quoted from above, Mr. Ransom indicated that his elegy may be read as I have just suggested. And in the same exchange with Brooks and Warren

he implied that even a third reading is possible, that stanzas two, three, and four of "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" may offer consolation by attributing to the child's passing "as much magnificence as possible."¹¹ To manage the transition from expression of grief to accommodation of grief according to this formula is more Stoic than naturalistic. But the Stoic formula combines easily with the classical as do both with the more-or-less religious offered earlier in this paper. At Vanderbilt University in November, 1961, I discussed all three (classical/naturalistic, Stoic, and religious) readings of the poem in question with Mr. Ransom. The poet accepted each as valid "if not pushed too far—to the exclusion of the others." That the one situation might provoke three distinctive and yet connected responses in the astonished mourners, and that all three can be rendered by the one image of the living behaviour of the girl they recall we might take to be an illustration of Ransom's theory that it is poetry's special province to capture and objectify the complex texture of "the world's body" in what he has described when speaking of such images as "inconclusive miracles."¹²

Finally, we must acknowledge and remember that, however we take "ready," the experience implicit in this poem's order is only minimally reassuring.¹³ The mourners remain, at its conclusion, "sternly stopped" and "vexed." Death is still death, the final deprivation of the living to whom the poem as an elegy is addressed. To see it otherwise is facile cheeriness—the aforementioned bland pseudo-"Platonism" against which Mr. Ransom inveighed at every opportunity. But, as reinforced by the muted, ceremonious, and archaic language in which it is clothed—a language which is itself comforting in that it has the effect of holding the loss and attendant pain at arm's length—the traditional design of "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" nevertheless enables it (in Ransom's own phrase) to "perform its nature" and identifies it as one of the finest modern examples of its poetic kind.¹⁴

For reasons which have to do with the kind of death of which they treat, two other Ransom poems concerned with a reaction to death and the consolation of the bereaved do not attempt to complete the full pattern of the elegy. They are the closely related

"Janet Waking" and "Dead Boy." But, though not elegies, they are elegiac—belonging to that oldest and most consistent stream in the poetic heritage of the English-speaking peoples. Of the elegy as a form Ransom has written that in its "gentle and extremely masculine tradition . . . performance is not rated by the rending of garments, heartbreak, verisimilitude of desolation. After all, an artist is standing before the public and bears the character of a qualified spokesman and a male. Let him somewhat loudly sweep the strings, even the tender human ones, but not without being almost military in his restraint; like the pomp at the funeral of a king whom everybody mourns publicly and nobody privately."¹⁵ All elegiac poetry has some of the same cremonious quality. It says, "The world is what it is, and the powers that rule it."¹⁶ Its object, in the phrase of Housman, is to "friend you/In the dark and cloudy day," to prepare us to endure the mysterious and unavoidable disappointments of life.

The problem of the little girl in "Janet Waking" is that, as a child, she is not ready to be prepared for life or "instructed" with such "bitter brew" as Housman's Terence ("Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff") concocts for the "heart and head" of his sanguine friends. But we who observe Janet are, in contrast, reminded forcefully of home truths learned eventually by all the "daughters of men." And we are old enough to listen.

Beautifully Janet slept
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother.
Only a small one gave she to her daddy
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
No kiss at all for her brother.

"Old Chucky, old Chucky!" she cried,
Running across the world upon the grass
To Chucky's house, and listening. But alas,
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee
 Came droning down on Chucky's old bald head
 And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,
 But how exceedingly

And purply did the knot
 Swell with the venom and communicate
 Its rigor! Now the poor comb stood up straight
 But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet
 Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen
 (Translated far beyond the daughters of men)
 To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath
 Janet implored us, "Wake her from her sleep!"
 And would not be instructed in how deep
 Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

The humor present in the first five stanzas of the poem is important to its effect. With the ancient peoples of Northern Europe a grim jest had always been a part of the elegiac admonition: part of the adult (or in Ransom's phrase, "masculine") way of controlling distress at the tricks of fate, of facing the worst with a semblance of grace. It is a kind of "play" which signifies interior control, the ability to regard one's own distress from the outside. But Janet, as a child, has not yet developed the protective reflex of her forefathers. The amusing contradiction between the hen's upright comb and the rest of her still remains could not strike a disconsolate child as confirmation of the inherited wisdom concerning the humorous ingredient in man's experience of mortality. Janet in her sorrow will not believe that she will someday cease to think of Chucky as she rises in the morning or that no one in her family has the power to recall her pet to life: that the kingdom of death is both "forgetful" and "deep." As an audience and witness to her grief, we are another matter, brought up short by a reminder of things we would ordinarily prefer to forget. Thus *our* "waking" to reality and preparation in mystery are further advanced, thanks in part to the agency of the elegiac poet.

"Dead Boy" is also elegiac, but not elegy. Indeed, the speaker in this poem is witness to rites for the death of a child which do very

little to "expand" or "lighten" the "riddle of mortality."¹⁷ Ransom argues of funerals in general that they are designed to decrease "preoccupation with the deadness of the body . . . by participation in . . . pageantry, and the bleak situation elaborated with such detail that it becomes massive, substantial and sufficient."¹⁸

But the grief not to be relieved in "Dead Boy" is corporate, not personal. A family dies with this "little man," even though many of its members survive for a time—enough to mourn themselves in mourning him. The mortality of families cannot be contained with the metaphors from nature which organize, in the traditional elegy, the response to the death of a person. According to Robert Penn Warren, these mourners "are aggrieved, not out of offended pride and vanity, but because there is a rupture of the elemental life process. The limbs are 'shorn and shaken' in this rupture of their commitment to the ineffable blood continuity, in this outrage to a natural value beyond rational discussion."¹⁹ The grief of a "dynastic wound" is incommunicable to those outside the closed circle of the blood. No empathic penetration is possible. But description itself is useful.

The little cousin is dead, by foul subtraction,
A green bough from Virginia's aged tree,
And none of the county kin like the transaction,
Nor some of the world of outer dark, like me.

A boy not beautiful, nor good, nor clever,
A black cloud full of storms too hot for keeping,
A sword beneath his mother's heart—yet never
Woman bewept her babe as this is weeping.

A pig with a pasty face, so I had said,
Squealing for cookies, kinned by poor pretense
With a noble house. But the little man quite dead,
I see the forbears' antique lineaments.

The elder men have strode by the box of death
To the wide flag porch, and muttering low send round
The bruit of the day. O friendly waste of breath!
Their hearts are hurt with a deep dynastic wound.

He was pale and little, the foolish neighbors say;
The first-fruits, saith the Preacher, the Lord hath taken;
But this was the old tree's late branch wrenched away,
Grieving the sapless limbs, the shorn and shaken.

From such spectacles as the funeral observed here we learn to face the "disintegration" of "the dearest possible values to which we can attach ourselves . . . as religiously and calmly as possible."²⁰ But not too easily, or with too much facility. Medical explanations will do no good, nor even the analogy to other sacrifice in the Holy Scripture, when no hope or promise can be added to supplement the rigor of the occasion. The "dead boy" had been hope incarnate, and is mourned by the "elder men" for the sake of what he might have been as part of their mortal immortality. Only his mother grieves simply for the child himself. Or at least seems to do so. Yet we are also told that her sorrow goes beyond the measure of ordinary maternal reaction at such a loss. The poem looks at death in several ways, and some of them are too painful for management by ceremony.²¹ Which makes of the ritual something all the more important in those situations where it will suffice, and of readiness for the hardest blows—those for which there is no palliative—a work of foresight. For we must sometimes suffer even when we do not understand. So wrote the author of *Job* and the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet of "The Wanderer." And many of their kindred since.

Other Ransom poems fit the patterns explored in this essay almost as well as the three I have chosen to remark. They further document this poet's sense of the genre, both elegiac and not, as vessels of tradition. It was an inheritance which Ransom came to possess on his own terms and then to defend in the body of his criticism. His relation to his own version of the tradition, his awareness of the social role of poetry, is a link between his work and that of his fellow Fugitives Davidson and Tate. But his full achievement as an artist also puts us in mind of other poets not at all Southern—Housman, Frost and Hardy. In any case, to study the persistence of the elegiac strain within the context of modern poetry requires a careful attention to the work of John Crowe Ransom.

NOTES

1. John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1964), pp. 58-60 and 4-5.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 30 and 59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
6. John Crowe Ransom, *Selected Poems*, Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 154.
7. From a conversation reproduced on p. 21 of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's collection of interviews with Robert Frost, Ransom, Robert Lowell, and Theodore Roethke entitled *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961).
8. These poems appear (in the order of my reference to them) on pp. 11, 36, 6, and 43 of Ransom's *Selected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 8. Ransom of course had written a good deal about the elegy in his two essays on "Lycidas."
10. Don Cameron Allen, *The Harmonious Vision* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1954), pp. 43-44.
11. Brooks and Warren, p. 21.
12. As a supplement (and complement) to this critique, the reader should see the examination given the same poem by Marion Montgomery in his "Bells for John Stewart's Burden: A Sermon upon the Desirable Death of the 'New Provincialism' Here Typified," *Georgia Review*, XX (Summer 1966), 176-179. Professor Montgomery gives an extensive account of the texture of the poem not attempted here.
13. Brooks and Warren, p. 21. Mr. Ransom acknowledged that the poem "ends inconclusively" even though it strives "to get on speaking terms with it [death]."
14. *Selected Poems*, p. 59; quoted from "Man Without Sense of Direction."
15. *The World's Body*, pp. 4-5.
16. Graham Hough, "John Crowe Ransom: The Poet and the Critic," pp. 186-205 of *John Crowe Ransom: Critical Essays and a Bibliography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), ed. Thomas Daniel Young. The quotation is from p. 198.
17. *The World's Body*, p. 35.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
19. Robert Penn Warren, "Notes on the Poetry of John Crowe Ransom at His Eightieth Birthday," *Kenyon Review*, XXX (Issue 3, 1968), 319-349. The quotation comes from pp. 337-338. Thomas Daniel Young, in *John Crowe Ransom* (Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 1971), p. 17, identifies the subject of the poem as the death of a family.
20. Quoted by Robert Penn Warren on p. 314 of his "Notes on the Poetry of John Crowe Ransom at His Eightieth Birthday" from a letter which Ransom wrote in the late 1920's concerning the motives behind his poetry.
21. For a discussion of these viewpoints in "Dead Boy," see pp. 62-63 of Robert Bufington's *The Equilibrist: A Study of John Crowe Ransom's Poetry* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

PART III

Toward a Dark Shape: Lytle's "Alchemy" and the Conquest of the New World

"Alchemy" is not one of Andrew Lytle's most ambitious fictions. Simplicity and straightforwardness distinguish it from the Tennessean's characteristic work: from a sequence of creations in which fable, angle of vision, texture, and subject matter modify and reinforce one another in weighted counterpoint. But this sixty-plus page novella is nonetheless a thing well and carefully made—an extended trope spun out of known history and filtered through a believable observer extrapolated from that history. Moreover, it is an extremely useful touchstone, an access into the thematic center or thrust of Mr. Lytle's career.¹

Like *At the Moon's Inn* (of which it is sequel or prologue), "Alchemy" is the tale of Spain's American expansion, of the "example of the conquistadors." Indeed, it is impossible to consider the one work without checking it against the other. Yet a better place for commencing this reading is Lytle's own criticism, especially "The Image as a Guide to Meaning in the Historical Novel," "The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," and certain splendid review essays.² The procedure is one that has been recommended at least indirectly by the novelist himself: "... reading is one way to learn to write." And he has followed his own

suggestion, even to the point of searching out what is paradigmatic of all "making" from his private creative labors.³ With "myth" or "image" in Lytle's novella I commence.

The title of "Alchemy" is both a description of an action and an allusion to the frame of reference within which that action unfolds in plot. In the person and performance of the alchemist is gathered much of what has made for the world as we have known it since the Renaissance. Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Goethe, Spengler, and Jung were well advised in their focus upon the breed.⁴ For it was always an anomaly in the accommodation of Grace with Nature that was feudal Christendom: an ominous anomaly that augured the disruption of that ontologically pious dispensation. The given creation always rankled in the bosoms of the grimy denizens of ancient laboratories. And the infernal overtones of their activities were not, from the medieval point of view, unfairly connected with a certain crafty fellow well acquainted with flame and sulphur. From alchemy and its halting efforts toward the transformation of dross into precious ore came the spirit of Francis Bacon, the herald of a new era in which mind and will would combine to further the "greater power and glory" of the species: in which the discursive reason shifted shape into a caldron great enough for seething most of the Western World. Add to the figure of the crypto-chemist the metaphoric associations of the westward and upward Peruvian journey (of conquest, enrichment, and death) toward what was foreseen by the journey makers themselves as a demiparadise, and the meaning of this title is completed, the image at the heart of Lytle's novella identified: a searching out and up, by sacrilegious means, toward the condition of a self-anointed godhead. Discovery and possession of the Indies are, therefore, in this narrative *an alchemy in men*, a movement of the spirit foreshadowing all else accomplished by certain Hispanic gentlemen in the Eldorado of their wicked dreams. Three tropes, all one in meaning, with the shift in space and fortune manifesting an inner and impious outreach toward a condition not available to our mortality.

Hovering just behind the action in "Alchemy" (as he was in *At the Moon's Inn*) is the presence or personage who made possible the

just described juxtaposition and melding of spatial and metaphysical overtones, the Admiral of the Ocean Seas, Don Christopher Columbus. The great Italian seaman is the original adventurer in the realms beyond the sunset. Hence he is the moral ancestor of Hernando de Soto, the antagonist in the Spanish novel; as he is of Francisco Pizarro, who plays the same role in Lytle's novella. The narrators in both works act Ishmael to the Ahab of their great captains. But the nameless soldier who speaks in the latter is never so taken up in his expedition's monomania as is Tovar, who painfully learns his way through and out of Florida in the former.⁵ Therefore he can, from the first, speak of the Governor General in a language that judges and condemns while it describes; can label Pizarro as a "witch" who "watched the brew of circumstance" among his men so as to "let its smell tell him what to do . . ." (p. 103). And, remembering, he can also give this report in the appropriate frame of reference, connecting the Peruvian march up-country with a conversation of the "great admiral" himself, words borrowed from an equally anonymous sentinel who had overheard Columbus's forecast of a "Paradise of Pleasure" in the mountains they are climbing (p. 124). But it is in *At the Moon's Inn* that all the conquistadors are morally gathered into their prototype. The episode in which this gathering occurs requires full examination before we turn to an analysis of the design of "Alchemy."

The portion of Lytle's De Soto novel to which I refer comes early (pp. 43-47) in that account of the first white incursion into the Southland and clarifies what is at stake in the hidalgo's decision to find his own Cuzco and Montezuma. Its scene is a predeparture banquet of De Soto and his lieutenants, a company he has brewed up into a compound suited to the Florida journey. Its principal is, however, one unlike these younger men, an ancient Marshal of Seville, crusader and true knight who serves well as a voice for the Godswear of medieval Spain. The old warrior has no horror of bloodshed or long marches. But for his generation military, political, and economic actions were exercises of trust, not means of self-glorification. And they believed in turn that genuine self-realization comes with acceptance of the obligations imposed by a place. Out of that background the Marshal admonishes the young

men before him concerning the spiritual unworthiness of the venture they are to commence on the following morning. As he describes his own part in wars against the heathen, details the perils yet confronting the Christian West, and builds to a final (and thoroughly ignored) toast to "that poverty of the Cross which is Spain," he points back to the beginnings of the apostasy he deplors. Columbus is the villain of his discourse, the "alchemist" who "left such a hole in Christendom that . . . it can never be plugged." In the fellowship of "new" men, empire-builders and victims of a secularized eschatology (including priests, noblemen, and his own grandson), this Quixote with a sting is alone. But the remainder of this novel proves him out as wiser than his sullen auditors. Later in *At the Moon's Inn*, in the book's climactic scene, the Adelantado of Florida, Civil and Military Governor of Cuba, Vice-Regent of God in North America (above Mexico), commits himself to the old enemy whom all alchemists serve, to him who from the first offered full power over and an immunity to the law of Nature.⁶ A near general ruin is the issue (pp. 366-374).⁷

In "Alchemy" we are not shown the final fruit of Pizarro's calculated presumption. But we are taken so far as the moment and place of its consummation, the interlude of silence following the great victory at Caxamalca. Like De Soto, Pizarro cannot finally corrupt himself unless he brings others to share in his undoing. His "brewing" is therefore slow and difficult, even with the record of earlier freebooting expeditions fresh in the memory of his men. Though the Spaniards are still nominally Christian, they are prevented from seeing their enterprise for what it is by the language of religious conflict which was part of the complex baggage they brought with them out of their recent victory over the Moors. This paradox is on the side of their leader, pushing the orthodox in his company toward the anti-miracle of which they speak, once triumphant. Almost every detail that Lytle rearranged, added to, or subtracted from the chronicles clarifies the reader's impression of this necromancy and therefore points up the burden of his interiorized retelling of their story.⁸ Every page of "Alchemy" builds toward this final and most significant of "inventions." Similarly, each moment contributes to the already described envelope of

metaphor surrounding and informing its plot. Both patterns are closed in the same nighttime colloquy.

After foreshadowing (in the "brewer" image) Pizarro's part in the remainder of the novella and marking his cohorts as "ignorant" and "gamblers," Lytle's narrator follows the amazing 177-man "army" from Tumbez and the muggy, infested coastlands (representing the ordinary human condition), across the barren Cordillera, the rich foothill valleys, and the front range of the Andes (signifying the inevitable struggles of the truly ambitious—usually the spiritually ambitious), and finally to the mountain fastness of Atahualpa and the "thing of radiance" (here a travesty of the spiritual, despite the crusader's rhetoric) which they imagine there awaits them (p. 164). But I have earlier identified the role of geography-as-figure in this sequence. It would be unintelligible without the addition of another ingredient to the dialectic of the total work. Just as Lytle uses the countryside of Peru to specify what his "visiting" Spaniards are about, he similarly employs its native inhabitants. And their role in giving significance to the tale is perhaps more important than place conquered or attitude of conquerors.

The Incas are the antitypes of their European adversaries. Indian passivity and absolutism aggravate the white men's assertiveness and individualism—do this even as it spells their empire's doom. The polity and religion of the ancient South Americans are indistinguishable and are centered in the person of their ruler. For that reason there are *no Indians but the Inca*: no one to secure that lord's position but the emperor himself. It is therefore unfortunate for him that he has permitted no initiative to any liegeman, even to his household guard, the Canari. The arrant effrontery of their slaughter in the courtyard disarms Atahualpa (pp. 160-162). In fact, the Inca has so completely swallowed his own rhetoric of deification that he and his minions come almost unarmed into Pizarro's lair. Had he not been so over-confident, the Spaniard would never have been permitted to arrive at that fortification (p. 135). In addition, his natural vanity has been recently strengthened by victory over a rival heir to his father, Huayna Capac. Once Atahualpa is pulled down from the royal chair, his

world is dead. That the "moss chins" should have intended this sacrilege from the moment of their landing was as inconceivable to his servants as it was to him. As Renaissance men, the Spaniards are *all will*. The Indians are *all submission*. The proper attitude of the truly human being is, of course, somewhere in between.'

The turn in "Alchemy" occurs halfway in Pizarro's march (pp. 131-132). Natural hazards, surprise, puzzlement, and fatigue begin to undermine the morale of his little band. While speaking always "like a man who repeats another's command" (p. 129), the skilled commander offers to release all who would leave to return to a base camp. To these faint hearts he will even reserve a small reward. But to the bold will go a "share" (a token of their active personal seconding of his design) of the "gold" waiting still higher among the peaks. The Gideon-like gesture (along with directions from the Inca's emissaries) removes the last troublesome impurity from Pizarro's alchemical mixture. The Spaniards who continue to Caxamalca need few orders and no encouragement in the remainder of their journey. Nor do they doubt again—not even when the "dark thing," always in attendance upon the alchemist, steps into the place of the "white robed" object of their desire and receives them into its embrace (p. 164).

Throughout this novella Lytle's narrator is addressing a silent audience, probably an audience of his peers (i.e., other old soldiers). He puts to them an implicit question about the fortune of their generation, especially as it shared in the opening of the New World. He does well (as a storyteller) to reserve his normative denomination of Pizarro until his tale is finished, until the label of "alchemist" is indisputable. For the same reason he is wise to delay the inversion of the novel's religious terminology until De Soto murmurs "miracle," until we have seen the man of God play devil's tool. Verisimilitude requires both procedures. And so does art.

In "Alchemy" a singular segment of Western history—a segment Catholic and full of echoes from the old dispensation—is rendered in a specifically transitional and retrospective context, a context reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's practice with point of view. All of these characteristics gave Andrew Lytle an opportunity to search out the full implications of modernity with an unusual and

ironic power: with far more authority and purchase than would have been possible had his scene been recent Northern Europe or North America. Mr. Lytle *found a shape* in the record of Pizarro and his band, an image inclusive of the meaning he had earlier discovered in the Southern experience. His Spanish fiction sheds a powerful refracted light on alchemists closer to home. They and their handiwork have ever been his theme.¹⁰

NOTES

1. I employ the text printed on pages 103-164 in *A Novel, A Novella and Four Stories* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958); the first appearance was in *Kenyon Review*, IV (Summer, 1942), 273-327. All subsequent citations from "Alchemy" are embodied in my text.

2. Most of these papers are collected in Lytle's *The Hero with the Private Parts* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 20; pp. 178-201. On page 9 of this volume, in the first of the essays referred to in the body of these remarks, Lytle observes of the importance of a governing metaphor or central image "placed at the post of observation and at the historical center of the author's seeing eye" to the organization of good historical fiction: "It was right to begin here, because it is here the author began. His image will not take the final measure of a book, but once it is located there will be less risk of mis-reading for there will be a common referent."

4. Lytle read Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* after the composition of "Alchemy."

5. *At the Moon's Inn* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1941). Further references to this book are indicated in the body of the essay.

Tovar's involvement in De Soto's vainglory facilitates the expansion of his "education" into a full novel. Only when warned by the haughty wanderer's ghost ("the will is not enough") does this loyal liegeman recognize what folly he has performed in questing after an "abiding city" in this sublunary, transient, and imperfectible world (pp. 396-398). The immunity of the narrator in "Alchemy" to the same sick dream makes inevitable that his account be brief. However, the veteran of Columbus's voyages gives a summary quality or depth to his post of observation as does the presence of Tovar and De Soto in Pizarro's band to the former's North American reportage.

6. For additional evidence of Lytle's preoccupation with modern man's Promethean attitude toward Nature as a target for his will, the reader should consult *The Hero with the Private Parts*, pp. 139, 158, 199, and 201; the "Introduction" to the second edition of *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1960), pp. x-xvii; "How Many Miles to Babylon," in *Southern Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953), eds. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs, pp. 31-34; and *Shenandoah*, III (Summer, 1952), 30-32, for an untitled Agrarian afterthought.

7. De Soto's specific sin in this scene is to usurp the authority of his priest.

8. The ancient historical documents concerning the Peruvian invasion are well represented in William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Peru* (Boston, 1847). That Lytle

knew and used Prescott is evident. Whether he worked back from that composite to its source I cannot say. I have used the Modern Library text of the Brahmin historian which contains the Peruvian study and also his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: Random House, n.d.).

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 762 and 773. Prescott observes that the monolithic properties of the Peruvian empire damaged the character of its citizens and made it ripe for conquest.

10. I have not accounted for much of the functional detail of "Alchemy": the ominous preparation by the narrator in his talk of Fortune (p. 109); in his meditation on the Incas' great road as a treadmill (p. 112); in his accounts of the conduct and appearance of the Incas' ambassadors (pp. 120-128). It is enough to say that in each of these details there is reinforcement for the interpretation I have attempted.

The High Cost of “Union”: Caroline Gordon’s Civil War Stories

Caroline Gordon was born and raised in the tobacco country of South-Central Kentucky, the rich limestone land defined by the great loop of the Cumberland River. Her kindred were early settlers in this “black patch.” Moreover, they persisted in their chosen location, numerous and proprietary, well into the middle years of this century.¹ The region is (and was always) indubitably Southern, with its roots in Virginia (Kentucky’s mother state) and (to a lesser extent) low country Maryland. The two decades preceding World War I produced few internal challenges to that denomination. Property and its owners combined there to slow the terrible pace of history and to measure in respectful cooperation the other (and more inevitable) marchings of time. From the beginning *this* Kentucky had been slaveholding and conservative, patriarchal and retrospective. *The people, in the place*, knew themselves—had an identity that required no discussion or introspection. Memories of the South’s struggle for independence—and of even more remote happenings, going back as far as collective recollection might reach—informed the total life of the community. These memories and the perspective in the light of which they have order predictably became the proper possession of the young woman who was,

almost from infancy, "called out" to give them form and lasting preservation.²

Of course the biographical is an inadequate machinery for the reader of serious fiction. And I do not mean to suggest that Miss Gordon's art is explained in her origins. As we would expect, many other influences enter in—especially in the later work. Nurture has continued to supplement nature, personal discovery to add upon inherited wisdom. However, in the treatment of the short stories which I shall here consider, the novelist of international experience and reputation is not an immediate problem. The Kentuckian *is*. For the modern audience, Southern or not, the subject must be recovered before the craft which moves us through it can be made intelligible. The composition and formal integrity of "The Forest of the South," "Hear the Nightingale Sing," and "The Ice House" deserve the closest possible attention.³ Each story, as a thing made, stands well on its own. Even so, from a necessity created by their themes and settings, the three tales should be treated in conjunction. Each renders as action some portion of the many-sided enemy which the South faced from 1861 through 1865 and in lesser but more deadly struggles before and since. Indeed, in working outward from the Yankee types appearing in this trio, it is possible to identify with remarkable accuracy what the "second American Revolution" and its sequels once meant to the spiritually rebellious of Kentucky and the upper South. Possible, I say, to discover *from the inside* a felt history and to acquire therefrom some sense of the unbelievably desperate character of the conflict which turned a total culture aside from its natural course toward an imaginary tomorrow about which we now know more than we would like.

From Miss Gordon's later meditations, from interviews, and from her novels, it is not difficult to justify an arrangement of these stories as a declension—a steady progression toward ruin. For if the South's defeat was a "calamity" not merely for itself but also a "calamity for the whole world," then the sequence of stages leading up to that defeat has a sobering significance in its own right⁴ and likewise the sequence of agencies responsible for its accomplishment. As Miss Gordon knew from prescriptive authority, as she further recognized on her own, the North did not come all at once

to the effort of making an even more "perfect Union." True enough, the War Between the States brought about the "second founding" Mr. Lincoln had anticipated since 1838. But only by slow stages, through a painfully circuitous winding *back* and *in*. The pattern implies, in other words, causation. Shifts in motive—though sometimes contradictory—set these stages off one from another. And each moment in this envelope of history was answered by a Southern response, a hyperbole in the South's view of itself and its peril shaped to negate its Yankee antithesis. Now received (and rarely challenged) myths about these hostilities—myths colored by present day politics and by the scholarly fashions engendered to be useful in authorizing still another push toward "Union"—hide from our view the arguments to which I make advertence. However, all that we need to comprehend of the said disputes is implicit in the fiction in question: that is, if we know to look for it.⁵

Miss Gordon did not choose to reprint "The Forest of the South" after the publication of the collection gathered under its title until 1981.⁶ No other fiction of hers, not even *None Shall Look Back* (perhaps the most utterly "unreconstructed" of Southern novels), is so severe upon the destructive innocence of that puzzle, the "mind of the North." The hero here, Lieutenant John Munford, is a conventional New England abolitionist type, a decent man flawed by abstractionism. Set over against Munford is his immediate superior, Major Reilly, a representative of the European hegemony rejected by Mundord's forbears in the building of that "city on a hill" of which John Winthrop, Peter Buckeley, and their heirs spoke early and with eloquence in the formation of New England. Another, lesser, antagonist is Captain Frank Macrae, a Southern officer captured by Munford and his rival in self-destructiveness. Eugénie Mazereau, however, is at the center of this short story. There is some mystery about her, both a madness and a method. Munford confronts, finally, only her—whether he knows it or not.

"The Forest of the South" opens with Munford and Reilly quartered at Villa Rose, the Mazereau plantation situated in the country outside Natchez. The two Federal officers are awaiting the destruction of Clifton, a great house close by which is to be blown up because Mr. Surget of Clifton has neglected to protect his

interests—has forgotten to invite the Yankee Chief Engineer to his sycophant dinners.⁷ This abuse of power is taken as a matter of course by these two champions of statism. Their tacit understanding is that unearned sorrow comes predictably to the conquered caught in the paths of campaigns like the one in which they are engaged. Taken with passivity, yes, but not for identical reasons. Reilly, the cynic and professional soldier who admires Clifton and the culture it represents, is (we are left to believe) dressed in Emancipation's blue coat only because arms are his profession and probable winners his preference in commanders. He never imagines that the war is "about" anything but power. Munford is something else. He is reluctant to believe that the Chief Engineer has hidden his private anger under the flag, has avenged an imagined insult in constructing the Federal "line of defense." For the Lieutenant the delusion of "collective election," of the "holy crusade," blurs all sense of human limitations in the comrades who have chosen with him to realize the eschatology of their *patria* (66). The older man mocks Munford's idealism and then sends the Lieutenant, well puzzled but uninstructed, back to the routine work of the garrison. The remainder of the story follows from this scene, this first moment of revelation. No detail is inert. Everything interacts—or will be revealed as interactive as the remainder of the narrative unfolds. Munford's exemplary innocence, the product of a mild but ineducable millennialism (and symbolized by the snow of his Connecticut recollections) has plunged him into a "forest," a dimension of experience close enough to his expectations to prevent his rethinking the military operation of which he makes a willing part and yet in its fundamental character almost completely unrelated to his "cause."

Clifton is a gaudy cotton snob's version of Brackets in *None Shall Look Back* and Penhally in the novel of that name. As a trope it operates in the economy of this work in the tradition of the country places so often saluted in the English poetry of the Renaissance (Jonson, Marvell, Pope, etc.) and in much "Tory" literature written since that time (Yeats, Ransom, Welty, Faulkner, Lytle, and other Southern novelists).⁸ Certainly it is, in some sense, the South. And, like the order it personifies, this splendid mansion (with its

gardens, fountains, and swan-filled, artificial lake) falls victim to Juggernaut—is converted into a symbolic sacrifice by the minions of that primordial authority. People such as the Chief Engineer (or the nameless Dutchman who slaughters the hapless Colonel Mazereau on his own porch) have found for their private impulses a release from the mandates of civilized behavior through their small part in “trampling out the grapes of wrath.” Munford does not share fully in this “liberty.” He cannot make war on noncombatants, forget courtesy, eschew the rule of manners, or neglect his duty as son and brother. Furthermore, he does not enjoy being hated personally for taking arms in behalf of his “ideals.” Yet he, as a public man, is so absorbed in the war that he cannot understand such hatred. The word “yankee” makes him wince, as does the memory of a girl in Tennessee who took an axe to her own piano rather than entertain Federal officers (69). Even so, Munford is a party to the psychology of “innocence by association” and plays a game on his foot with the obsequious belly-up cur bitch favored by his men. And then he is harsh with that dog (62). This interlude on the stairs, occurring with Munford on his way to inquire after the needs of the ladies of the commandeered house, informs the reader that Villa Rose is as fully “destroyed” as Clifton—even though interior demoralization, not dynamite, is the cause. And it also marks the Connecticut officer and the objects of his solicitude as an extension of the desecrators vs. Clifton antithesis.

As I have indicated, Munford is in his own right a fine man—apart from his notions. Events like the wrathful explosion of the Tennessee girl and the destruction of Clifton give him pause. Indeed he has an inchoate uneasiness about “the conflict in which he [is] engaged” (66). Whose land “by rights” (66)? The question troubles him. And perhaps this (her charms aside) helps to explain his gravitation to Miss Mazereau. As is common in Miss Gordon’s fiction, the passion develops swiftly and in large measure thanks to the girl. Munford’s implicitly compensatory attentions, proceeding from a number of walks and rides in the country—especially one following hard after that visit to the ladies’ cloister in the overseer’s room and after Major Reilly’s story of their suffering, is a piece of effrontery. His immediate superior warns the boy that he is “rash”

(72). But Eugénie has mesmerized him. And perhaps on purpose. At the time of this second moment or climax to the story he has sensed a "menace" in the shining Natchez air (60). He has watched the magnolia blossom "turn brown in his grasp" (67). He knows that he is out of his element. Nonetheless, in the path of Amasa Delano of Melville's "Benito Cereno" and of his successors among righteous New England heroes, he never falters in the course of his optimism. Eugénie's mad smile in the Macrae garden is to him only an invitation. That it might be a vengeful snare never occurs to his confident simplicity.

Miss Mazereau is a "queer girl," as Reilly and John Munford agree. Strange, and as the Lieutenant should recognize, with reason. The mother is distraught at the death of Arsène, her husband, killed before the eyes of wife and child. Even before the war the family had broken with its Southern neighbors; and therefore the two women are without friends. Terror and craft combine in Eugénie's response. Her mother's escape is in pretending she is back in the Virginia of her girlhood. Eugénie pretends that she loves Yankees. First she becomes as obsequious as the aforementioned cur. She is grateful for indignities and thus makes her "captors" uncomfortable (63). Then she pushes the strategy further. She plays the coquette with Munford in the Macraes' deserted garden close by Villa Rose. Later, more overtly, she tolls back her "ogre" over to that lifeless fountain and melancholy statue of a woman pouring water in the midst of waste. Once more the situation should have a premonitory effect on Connecticut's sanguine son. The scene cries out what forest he is in, that tigers are abroad in this land. But he is overcome by the juxtaposition of a dreamy Eugénie and the inverted image of earth's ordered bounty which frames her "faint mysterious smile." He finds her "the most attractive woman he has ever seen" (68) and ignores the thought that her vacancy has come of "seeing something [she] cannot look away from" (70).

At this point we should be reminded of numerous tales of reconciliation through intersectional marriage written in the century following the "Great Rebellion." Miss Gordon has constructed a parody—a comment on the presumption of this propaganda fiction; for this marriage is a deepening of conflict, not

an armistice. John does not associate Clifton or the garden of the Macraes with Eugénie. Neither will he admit that only a madwoman—a woman bent on terrible private revenge—could accept his suit under these circumstances. Being a man of “principle,” he assumes that his private relations with the “enemy” need not be touched by the “exigencies” of war, by his enactment of a public virtue. The girl’s suffering and his status, he assumes, are left behind when he gets Eugénie into his buggy. Soon he is ready to send her home to his sister and even to “answer for [her] loyalty” (72)—a special irony since (in its inference that personal commitments will outweigh political choice) it contradicts the basic assumption of his position as a Federal soldier. He will not consider Reilly’s reference to the men in the Mazereau family who are in Confederate service. For Eugénie does not call him Yankee. Totally feminine, she is beyond ideology. About this he is correct. And for such cause he should be wary of her separation from the notoriously unforgiving attitude of Southern women: a collective and impersonal hatred of persons whose identity is ideology. That the difference between the open hatred of her Southern sisters and Eugénie’s smile masks an instinct to draw all her enemies privily after her into the “dark” and the cobwebs he is too “noble” to believe. That is, until one more ingredient is added to his adventure in Mississippi.

Miss Mazereau, Munford discovers, does not hate Yankees by name in that her malice has a more inclusive object. Men in general have been her nemesis. She uses John to injure one of them, her cousin Frank Macrae. The precise nature of this cousin to cousin relationship is not specified by the author. Yet it is clear that the Connecticut Lieutenant is lured back to the Macrae plantation only that he may capture the unsuspecting Rebel officer. Munford’s first thought when Eugénie summons him from his work is that the girl is going to cancel their engagement. Then, at the door of the Macrae house, he considers the possibility of ambush. Eugénie reassures him that only one man made the boot tracks he finds in the hall. Macrae is, however, not merely alone. In fact he plainly expects a visit from Miss Mazereau, has seen the girl here not long before, is off his guard and not at the moment involved in

any military business. There is, though, explanation for this offense against the blood located earlier in the story, explanation in keeping with the perverse "logic" of Eugénie's derangement. On the occasion of their first trip to the Macrae home Munford is told by his sweetheart that Cousin Frank once mischievously "decorated" the statue Eugénie stands in front of. The girl's eye brightens in recounting the story and she withdraws from John's caress (70). All of which is to say that (among other things) young Macrae is like the Federal soldiers: he has ruined the "garden" in which woman's role is affirmed symbolically and thus reduced her dignity to a jest. In the historic action, he renders the sin of the Old Order in subjecting its women to the unendurable trials of total war. What more is involved we cannot say. But as Frank tells his captor, there is a bond linking him to Eugénie, a bond beyond the concern for property that he mentions which compels him to marry her before his imminent execution. (Macrae is a spy, and is captured in a Federal uniform—a fact which adds to the already complicated overtones of the episode.) Munford does not consider the curiosity of his lady's conduct. His innocence (which equates his courtship of Eugénie and his earlier attentions to Connecticut girls) can concede only a gust of pity for his male captive and a moment's indignation when Macrae proposes to marry Eugénie himself. He answers "haughtily," lifting his "fair head": "That is impossible, Captain. Your cousin has promised to marry me" (75).⁹ He will make her happy, make her forget everything that has happened. Macrae is more surprised by this speech than he is with his cousin's treachery. But with the authority inherent in his situation and his previous words of solicitude for the girl, he brings home finally to the Northern soldier the awful truth about his commitment to Eugénie.

This third moment of illumination is too quiet to be called an epiphany. But it does round off Miss Gordon's evocative story on an appropriate note. After hearing from Eugénie's lips the sound that madness makes, after being told "I do not envy you" (76) by a man who is devoted to her and yet soon to die, Munford finally understands the enigmatic smile. Having made the engagement public and having committed himself to intersectional combination

as the North (on the level of the story's historical-political significance), Munford must submit to the image of his future as a deceptively pleasant green meadow, set in a "dark and gauzy" frame under an ominous, exaggerated light. Macrae's victorious glance confirms that Eugénie is the South John Munford deserves. As womankind's mythic representative, she is taken but still certain to punish the taker—despite any military success. There is, though, explanation for this offense: their archetypal Union *manqué*—just as she has punished for correlative misdeeds Munford's Confederate counterpart. Surface action, topical envelope, and anagogical thrust mesh with telling symmetry in the Yankee soldier's "dull" submission to his fate—perhaps more telling today than at the time of Miss Gordon's composition.

As I have described him, John Munford is the serious abolitionist version of the ancient "double truth" heresy, widely accepted by arrant modernists since the Renaissance, and thus a gloss on native American Jacobinism as it made for one side of that split.¹⁰ He is also the first step in the declension I am constructing. The Indiana soldier in "Hear the Nightingale Sing," in his non-ideological Midwestern complaisance, betokens the political triumph of the Lieutenant's breed. Thanks to the "free soil" enthusiasms of the Old Northwest, this bluff giant may be treated as a counter for the second stage in the North's self-conversion into Leviathan. He is Grant to Munford's Sumner, in blue because his neighbors wear that color, chauvinist but not presumptuously self-righteous.¹¹ This boy's Unionism is therefore of the accessory variety. He expects Rebels to hate him. No houses are destroyed in his campaign, only stock stolen and a little food seized from hungry mouths. And his feminine antagonist is almost sane, even once she is done with him. For those reasons the homeward-bound Yankee of this account comes to a fortune appropriately less severe than that of his "formal cause." He is merely killed.

But if the two stories are different they are also alike. Again there are three stages of the unfolding—one before the soldier appears, another with him inside a nameless Southern farmhouse, and the last after he has expropriated for "government" the special pet of the protagonist Barbara, her spoiled mule Lightning. With

each turn the mood of atrocity deepens and the soldier comes closer to expiating his share of responsibility in its creation. In addition, there is once again a further complication from the presence of a Confederate soldier (this time inferential). Finally, even though Barbara is closer "kin" to the angry Tennessee girl who haunts Munford's memory, the war has cut her off from the normal feminine life almost as much as it restricted Eugénie. The young Yankee who has been a strange mixture of house-breaker-thief and gentleman caller in her home is left crushed in the woods; and her putative lover, Tom Ladd (for whose sake she so cherishes the mule), is assumed to be just as lost to the purposes of life.

In the opening section of "Hear the Nightingale Sing," what Aristotle calls the "narration" occurs. The character and earlier life of Barbara are established in the reader's mind. Furthermore, the complication is anticipated. For Tom Ladd's gift to her girlhood, the one contact with an interrupted love left in the young woman's world, is missing—broken from his tether in the forest hiding place in which her family conceals its mounts. Barbara is alarmed and goes searching for her "baby." The enemy, she knows, is close at hand—marauders such as those who had some months before emptied the smokehouse on the plantation where she resides. As this spirited girl hunts her animal and, once she has found him, after Lightning is led into the cellar beneath her house, she thinks back on the way in which she acquired the mule and a world (only two years gone) where such an acquisition could occur. The restrained drama of the scene plus the recollections bring us to the departed Ladd and to what Barbara is keeping alive through her "no 'count" toy (43).

Ladd had established a bond between himself and this young neighbor girl—a bond which perhaps was an appropriate preliminary to courtship, in view of her age—in offering her the colt of a fine old mare. When Lightfoot's last colt comes mule (he had not so ordered it), Tom sticks to his promise. Ladd loves horses; Barbara loves all creatures, perhaps too much, and prizes her mule all the more for the sake of sad rememberings concerning work mules whose labors she had attempted to interrupt as a small child. Since the affection between the young couple has remained un-

spoken, Lightning and his upbringing become the idiom of its continuance. For Ladd had gone to the war just before Barbara got a proposal out of him. The girl, in his absence as before in her adolescence, has only the pet for expression of her loving nature. Indeed, it is the center of her life—fed and attended to even though her family suffers from hunger and lack of direction (48). Barbara's affectionate childish banter to the mule is the language Southern women reserve for children, favorite animals—and lovers. It defines the purpose Lightning serves in the diminished compass of her powerful will to be. However, as the song sung by a wandering soldier passing through her woods reminds her, will is not enough. Love has no place in the universe she has left, only a few ironies touching upon that subject.

Even though he moves her to hurry and to hide Lightning under the house, the soldier is a greater threat to her fabric of illusion than Barbara at first perceives. A dauntless heart however stirs first to front its troubles and only then pauses to call them by a name. The Southern girl's "complication" is swift. She is injured in leading the animal down backsteps. Then she quarrels with her sister about the arrangement. Soon thereafter the Yankee is at the door. Barbara's blood is up as when now-dead mother and missing father belittled Tom Ladd in her presence (45). And though the young man (seemingly on his way home on leave) eats up the meager supper ready for the residents of this poor house, his intrusion is answered with even more spirit. Older sister Sophy and twelve-year-old Cummy are in Barbara's charge. And she therefore presides over the interlude, straining the Indiana boy and never allowing him the advantage. He is not uncivil, and steals his supper as if it had been given. The war has hardened him to these "necessities." But he teases Barbara a little, saying "Damn Reb" just to vex her. To him it is a game with a very diminished but still viable set of rules which he plays with these enemies. He seems to have no sense of the degradation issuing from the parts enacted by both sides. Barbara, for her own part, already wishes she could kill him. She leaves the interloper eating and returns to the parlor. He follows shortly to offer thanks and begins to fasten his cloak. Then parts shift swiftly as the soldier begins to sing. Brother and sister

return to the house from the porch and the Yankee is for a moment almost converted into a young man come a-courting. Something stands above politics for Southern girl and Federal soldier. He admires the house, speaks of things in common, and then returns to his song of spring and sorrow in love. It releases common memories and preoccupations. His home is far away in space as Barbara's is in time; and home means families and, as Andrew Lytle says, "the right relationships between the sexes."¹² She softens and begins to recall the "night of Marie's wedding" when Tom Ladd almost became hers (51). This interlude objectifies the price of war at the personal level and thus brings it back within ordinate boundaries. Love, like Philomela, should not be betrayed. Revenge is the certain issue of such errors. But it is only a moment that is created by song.

The soldier hears a noise. Lightning is predictably restless in the cellar. And his need for a mount overcomes the home-hungry soldier's fear of an ambush. Now we come to the third division of "Hear the Nightingale Sing." It is brief and telling. Barbara of course interferes with the Yankee's theft of her pet. With no ceremony, he throws her to the ground and is thereafter not at all convincing when he attempts to explain away this violence which flared momentarily in his eyes and through his hand as an effort to "protect" his prize of war. Such behavior belies his song and his earlier conduct. We assume that it comes of a habit developed to protect himself from the truth of his life in the South. But the boy doesn't wait to tell us more. He refers his Southern victims to the winded horse he had abandoned a few miles up the road, ignores Cummy's warning that the mule is unmanageable, and mounts it running toward the woods. Exactly according to Barbara's earlier wish and present imagination, Lightning—"brute instinctual force in a sterile form"—swiftly dispenses with the hateful rider. With mule recovered, Tom Ladd (the only one who could handle him) is still lost. There is no one to "play the man's part." But the war, "gone beyond its restricted concept" in the lone Federal, once more is identified as a peril to conqueror as much as to conquered. Our last view of the Yankee specifies what is foreshadowed in the remainder of the story: his death fits his (and his species') error in

that, with his eyes kicked in, he has been symbolically castrated—denied in fact the home and civil existence suggested in his song which he has already forfeited in spirit. Further confirmation of this view of the episode appears in Barbara's parting response to his curiously situated remains (spread out against a tree). She denies her enemy burial, thus denominating him inhuman. This is the same girl who felt sympathy for slaves and would not let her father's hands crack a whip over a pulling team (44). Yet when she follows her cold triumph with "let's go home," we sense how the tenuous fancy which she still sustains in her pet may explain the transformation of so gentle a person into an embodiment of hate (56). That is to say, the moods of Barbara in the context of the story's total action drive the reader to a judgment concerning *all* the subjects which it examines. Personal outrage, given and returned, is an emblem of moral and political outrage. Barbara has no "place," only (like Philomela) a memory and a deep feeling of injury. Thanks to himself, the soldier never gets "home" either, never even recovers personhood in Christian burial. The devastation of the South swallows both. What this means to a total nation similarly "savaged"—what it says of the process occasioning that dreadful wasting—should not be far to seek.¹³

"The Ice House" is a simpler story than the two just considered. In a tone of dry mockery it completes the declension begun and extended in "Forest of the South" and "Hear the Nightingale Sing." With the old American order of well-located, civilly connected families decimated in conflict with itself, something new is left to feed upon the remains of Connecticut and Mississippi, Indiana and Tennessee-Kentucky. Miss Gordon's name for this vulture is "opportunity" (81). Its form is that of a puffy decadent Federal contractor whose version of the carpetbagger's "main-chance in the South" comes in the unrecovered bodies of his countrymen, left for collection and proper burial near the battlefields where they fell. In this "forest" they tangled. But it is still possible to employ what is left of them, to bind up the nation's wounds in a profit. As we consider the nameless contractor of this story, we should recall what came after Lincoln, what occurred in the last four decades of the previous century. Jay Gould is hardly

what the New England idealists had in mind as a consequence of their (and their minions') blood and labor. Neither does he represent anything good for the farmers of Indiana. By reason of exhaustion, heavy casualties, and consequent default, business (instead of politics or war) has become the accepted way of improving upon and ordering the national reality. That society is dead we are informed not only by the bodies gathered like meat in the ice house but also by the absence of women and kindred from the context of their excavation.¹⁴ As a principle, there is in this narrative only the self ("by the head")—only appetite—and therefore as characters only the atomistic individuals who follow these appetites. The contractor's byword, "opportunity," cannot easily coexist with the traditional network of interdependencies, courtesies, and multidimensional associations that had been the commonweal. For, unto itself, it takes out of that ancient milieu even the memory of its sacramental sanctions. The authors of *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, had foreseen—at the time of the Republic's founding—that commercial interests would be the cement holding together its ineluctably "various" social and cultural components. In addition, these gentlemen also expected such preconfederal elements to persist in their original distinctiveness *under* the benign and self-restricting umbrella of the commercially grounded national government. The former had as their most serious function the preservation of humane sanctions for the latter. After Appomattox these sanctions were no longer in force. So much for the "meaning" of the Civil War, the issue of all the motives going into its prosecution. Union, as personified by Miss Gordon's contractor, has become absolute, much to the ultimate dismay of its most metaphysical exponents.¹⁵

Doug and Raeburn, the Southern boys hired by the visiting entrepreneur to dig up carrion, are, in their attitudes toward the dead Yankees, an extrapolation of Barbara's callousness in the final scene of "Hear the Nightingale Sing." These perfectly "detached" and ingenuous observers are once more rendered in three stages. First, the place and time (plus their characters) are established (77-80). It is 1866, four years since the winter day when the dead from the battle were deposited in a Southern ice house. Furthermore, they are nothing to these young men, "no more than . . . a dead

hawg" (78). Doug and Raeburn speak of catfish, of their employer, and of the attitude of the blacks toward the handling of the dead. They mention other men who would not do this work; and, for a time, they get a little sick from the stench of their occupation. But silver is scarce in their neighborhood. Moreover, they like to work together. Even so, their minds are on the fishing to which they almost gave the day in spite of the money, on that and their honor in giving the Yankee what he pays for (77). And they come away largely unaffected by the job. The author makes of them completely natural young Southerners of their generation. And she also gives the contractor his humanities. It is part of the strategy of her fabling—lends authority to its burden. By means of such details we are made to know *for ourselves* what the principals could not fully tell us.

These boys can work skeletons as if they were so much cordwood because of what has already been done to these unidentifiable cadavers, because the remains have been there for some time, and because the movers are young and apparently little affected by the late war. For all these reasons, and for one more. And that is, of course, the imputed significance given this "government property" by the government's representative.

In the middle portion of this story (80-84), the contractor is introduced—his person, his amiability, and his "practical" philosophy. Here the boys get their job done, and the horror of it is represented vigorously to our imagination. Skeletons are lifted out of the ice house, placed in a wheelbarrow, and rolled out of sight for confinement by the contractor in his row of coffins. There is also in this section considerable foreshadowing of Miss Gordon's macabre denouement. For the boys begin to suspect, in the course of the day, that their employer is not treating his "charges" properly. They talk to keep their minds off the business at hand, and the bloated old Yankee leaves for a time, expecting to borrow a ladder from one of his former enemies, *just as if there had been no war* (82). The skeletons break up in the hands of their manipulators, and the odor rising from the bones is that of "an abandoned slaughter house." But the day draws to a close, and the contractor returns empty-handed.

In the story's conclusion (84-85), after the boys have recovered

enough Yankee remains to fill the contractor's boxes, to their small surprise but general relief, he discharges them, saying, "I don't believe I'll be needin' you boys tomorrow" (84). However, they wait around and, to check out their suspicions, spy on the old man from behind a clump of buckberry bushes. These doubts are confirmed. For as they soon discover, the old Yankee has decided to save himself trouble by dividing up the bodies in such a way as to fill his coffins with one day's paid labor. After Doug and Raeburn have left the scene, they laugh: "If that ain't a Yankee fer ye!" (85) For now they are certain: "There ain't a whole man in ary one of them boxes."¹⁶

Clearly the boys are saying more than they know, are offering a judgment of the invasion whose detritus has been for a time their problem. All unilinear, simplistic approaches to the human condition carry in themselves the potential of such fracturing as they have identified. Miss Gordon is observing in her Civil War stories (as she observed in *None Shall Look Back*) that Americans, in the middle years of the past century, went through a series of such approaches. The contractor embodies one in which they were finally united. Like "The Ice House," it was an ironic conclusion—a wry comment on the high cost of all such Unions in death.

NOTES

1. For an entertaining discussion of this survival, see Malcolm Cowley's "The Meriwether Connection," *Southern Review*, I, N.S. (Winter, 1965), 45-56.

2. Caroline Gordon, "A Narrow Heart: The Portrait of a Woman," *The Transatlantic Review*, no. 3 (Spring, 1960), 7-19.

3. The stories discussed here appeared together in *The Forest of the South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945) on pp. 57-76, 42-56, and 77-85, respectively. Hereinafter I shall refer to them with page references from this edition. "The Forest of the South" was first published in 1944, "Hear the Nightingale Sing" in 1945, and "The Ice House" in 1931.

4. Caroline Gordon, "Cock-Crow," *Southern Review*, I, N.S. (Summer, 1965), 558.

5. On the dialectic, see William R. Taylor's *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (New York: George Braziller, 1961); a good supplement is Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968).

6. *Collected Stories of Caroline Gordon* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981). Of the three Civil War stories, only "Hear the Nightingale Sing" and "The Ice House" were included in *Old Red and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963). Response to these stories (apart from Andrew Lytle's "The Forest of the South," in *Critique*, I [Winter, 1956], 3-9; Vivienne Koch's review essay of the same title in *Sewanee Review*, LIV [Summer, 1946], 543-548; Marie Fletcher's "The Fate of Women in a Changing South: A Persistent Theme in the Fiction of Caroline Gordon," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXI [Winter, 1967-1968], 17-28; and Frederick P. W. McDowell's pamphlet, *Caroline Gordon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1966) has been imperceptive and hostile—probably for reasons touching upon still surviving differences in regional sensibility. For example, see Chester E. Eisinger's *Fiction in the Forties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 189-190; or William Van O'Connor's "Art and Miss Gordon," pp. 314-322 of *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), ed. by Louis D. Rubin Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs.

None Shall Look Back (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937) and also *Penhally* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931) have encountered the same ideological irritation that has obscured our view of the Civil War short stories.

7. Natchez, unlike Vicksburg, surrendered swiftly upon appearance of the invader. Surget represents (along with the cur dog which appears later) the practical "advantage" of such disloyalty to the South.

8. See Guy A. Cardwell's "The Plantation House: An Analogical Image," *Southern Literary Journal*, II (Fall, 1969), 3-21. Later in the story the "great house" image is reinforced by another traditional figure, that of the garden. Thanks to Eugénie, the two tropes blend easily.

Mr. Lytle (in the *Critique* article) has identified Clifton as the story's controlling image. Like the Macrae garden, however, it is an inverted image.

9. In the metaphorical system of this story Munford's blond hair extends the suggestion of his lengthy recollections of snow. James E. Rocks, in "The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon," *Tulane Studies in English*, XVIII (1970), 121, sees Munford as an "innocent" of the "ever-optimistic North." However, Rocks does not believe that the Lieutenant is ever disabused of his folly.

10. Vivienne Koch (*op. cit.*, pp. 547-548) has a clear understanding of this public-private split as an ambivalence between violence and protectiveness. She identifies this element in "The Forest of the South" and "Hear the Nightingale Sing" as "political parable."

Confusion between the public and private thing is a recurrent motif in Southern literature. Instances from Faulkner, Warren, and Lytle come quickly to mind. But perhaps the most instructive parallel to Munford is Stark Young's portrait of General W. T. Sherman in his *So Red the Rose* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 298-314. The roots of this error go back, of course, to the secularization of the New England eschatology just prior to the first American Revolution. (Sherman differs from Munford in being a non-abolitionist. Union was his first priority; and in this he is probably closer to Lincoln than to the New Englanders who were themselves ready at one point to secede.)

11. My somewhat elliptical reference here is to the way in which the militantly anti-Negro, non-millennialist (and at least not anti-Southern) Midwest was drawn behind Lincoln's candidacy and the subsequent war effort despite a great difference in the motives animating that region and New England in their cooperation. Sumner personifies the latter, Grant the former. On this progression, see James A. Rawley's *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1969); Eugene H. Berwanger's *The Frontier Against Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1967); and V. Jacque Voegeli's *Free But Not Equal* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967). The Midwest fought the Slave Power because it threatened a black tide sweeping over their white man's world—because it was "soft" on race—and also out of "democratic" resentment of what appeared to be a feudal and arrogant quality in Dixie's spokesmen. Which is, of course, another name for sectionalism.

And, of course, frontier and recently frontier sections of the Midwest are full of nationalism in an expansionist culture. This, during and after the Civil War, organized itself into the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

12. Lytle, *op. cit.*, p. 5. In the same essay, Mr. Lytle finds in "home" the "enveloping action"—"that constant symbol of family, whose large connections, based upon a Christian sacrament, make up the structure of the state." Rocks (*op. cit.*, p. 121) perceives in the same material only a "simple" statement of "Southern hatred" and a sense of "future doom." However, he is helpful on the soldier's song and (therefore) the story's title. Miss Koch (as I have noted above) supports the approach of Lytle—as does McDowell (*op. cit.*, p. 14).

13. Apart from its obvious importance and the probable confusion which it is likely to produce in the modern reader, my point in emphasizing the political burden of these stories is to stress the coherence and simultaneity of their meanings at various levels. Of course, the political force of each narrative depends upon its dramatic and moral force. For impressionist fiction (like its Southern subject in these stories of Miss Gordon) refuses the "trap" of the "double truth" and the related impulse to consider as the whole of man one feature of his condition. Insofar as we use the word in connection with modern absolutist politics, art is pre-political. The definition of man in his political (or economic or intellectual) activity—or the explanation of the *will of providence* in such terms—is the source for the justification of total war implicit in the conduct of John Munford and the soldier of "Hear the Nightingale Sing." It is part of the gnostic rejection of the world as "given." Systems of various kinds are the magic called upon to erase the infamy. The elite, who know this magic (and who assume that all men would give assent to its use if they knew what it might bring), "are freed by that knowledge"; their "horror" is thus only "prelude to harmony" (J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960], pp. 35, 107, 132, and 251; and also Richard Weaver's "A Dialectic of Total War," on pp. 92-112 of *Visions of Order* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964]).

14. An old-fashioned ice house resembled what is now called a storm cellar—an out-building partially underground where (in climates in which lakes, streams, and ponds froze solid in winter) ice was preserved in sawdust for warm weather use. Sometimes food was stored in these subterranean depositories.

15. Henry Adams (especially in his novel *Democracy*) is a convenient reference for Northern disenchantment with the fruits of victory. Another is Herman Melville. On the general subject, see George M. Fredrickson's *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

16. The only useful comment on this story is by Lytle (*op. cit.*, pp. 7-8). As he observes, "Death is, of course, the final comment on matter."

Meaning and Metaphor in Donald Davidson's "A Touch of Snow"

The poetic career of Donald Davidson extended over a period of more than forty years. And even though the making of poetry in Davidson's life had to coexist with a great variety of other undertakings—pedagogical, critical, historical, political, and even musical (Davidson wrote the *libretto* to an opera)—his poetic achievement was continuous and considerable. Indeed it can reasonably be argued on the basis of his last collection of new verse (1961), *The Long Street* (Davidson's favorite metaphor for his imaginative experience of life in this century), that his finest, most impressive poetry came at the end of his career; and what distinguishes and gives especial value to these productions of his artistic maturity is precisely what set him off from his poetic contemporaries since the Fugitive days and the first publication of *The Tall Men* (1927)—a preference for and personal possession of a traditional idiom and sense of the metaphorical potential of the familiar. These he drew from the mainstreams of our Western cultural heritage, from Scripture, classics, and (as Louise Cowan has well described it) "a sacramental view of nature." That he seriously *means* this idiom and these metaphors gives to him what now-fashionable critics might prefer to speak of as "a command of

archetypes"—and (among the poets of this century) an almost unique relationship to his chosen role.

I

"A Touch of Snow," which appears in *The Long Street* (1961), is among the best of Davidson's later lyrics. It reads as follows:

Cold showers, drumming fit to wake the dead,
From morning darkness rout us out of bed.
As yet there's no last trumpet we can hear,
But fog on the mountain, rain, the turn of the year,
And on our brows that sudden breath, too soon, too near,
Proclaim summer must go.

Two wise men on our porch with ladder and brush
Turn broad backs to the north and the wind's rush.
They had counted on our porch to paint inside
When it should rain, if God should so decide.
And do they feel no other gust, of time, of tide?
They must know what I know.

They must know what comes next when a season shifts.
"Won't there be snow, high up, when the fog lifts?"
They shake their heads. Not theirs the risk to say
Unlucky weather's somewhere on the way.
"Oh, never mind the ridge," one holds, "long as we may
Keep summer here below."

From where that summer stays we still can watch
For any higher warnings man should catch:
Stars old or new that course the telltale night;
Tree-shapes that blaze too fair for mortal sight;
Or mist flurries writing MENE there on our mountain height
With just a touch of snow.

Now that the fog-veils lift, we see it clear—
A stretch of white that marks the turn of the year.
Summer may dally here with autumn-tide,
But we believe what the mountain testified.
Before God's frosty breath leaves snow too deep, too wide,
We'll make our turn, and go.'

In theme, this poem is a restatement of Davidson's sense of the impending crises facing (or already upon) Western civilization which had earlier its best-known expression in "Fire on Belmont

Street," the epilogue to "The Tall Men," an epic-spirited assessment in many sections of his own personal heritage. Other close relatives are the dramatic monologues entitled "Lee in the Mountains" and "Sanctuary," themselves in the prophetic vein. But the more recent poem is—perhaps because of the poet's long tenure in the character he developed in "The Tall Men" and persisted with in his journey down the "long street," perhaps because snow is not so dramatic as fire or the meditations of warriors—less admonitory and aggressive than its earlier counterparts; and with its use of a New England setting and avoidance of direct address, more inclusive in its suggestiveness. Davidson's unremitting preoccupation with what happens in and to the South is here absorbed into the context of larger developments of which regional or even national histories are merely symptomatic miniatures.

An urgent concern for and anticipation of "the decline of the West" and the obliviousness with which we approach this dissolution Davidson had in common with a great many modern poets. We think immediately of his fellow Fugitive Allen Tate; of Yeats ("The Second Coming" especially); of Auden, Eliot, and Pound. We have had no lack of apocalyptic oracles from contemporary English and American poets. However, Davidson's mature expression of his anxiety, well represented by the classical/biblical idiom which is the flesh of this example of his most mature manner, has a quality of its own and is illustrative of a strategy itself worthy of attention. For Davidson was in style, as indigenously American—*of* his particular heritage as a conservative Southerner, a product of classical education, orthodox religious orientation and experience of his times from the perspective which these, together, provide—as he was in theme. And the resolution of manner and vision in his latest verse (which I do not here recommend at the expense of what he produced in the twenties and thirties, but rather as an introduction to that poetry) is as much high art as any of the conventional ingenious solipsisms whose example he avoided. For reasons of history (i.e., origin, education, and open commitment to causes he could not refuse to champion and still be himself), Davidson, as a poet and as a public man, has been denied the hearing he deserves. Too often has it been assumed that these commitments do

themselves preclude any serious consideration of his art when in fact they are, insofar as they made "available" to him the language and perspective of our elder poets, a partial explanation of the merit of that art. It may, however, be suggested that the remedy for ignorance is criticism, the examination of his work on its own terms, which is what is here attempted.

II

The metaphorical organization of "A Touch of Snow" depends, as does that of most of his poetry from the beginning of his career, upon the symbolic suggestiveness of elemental forces or presences: winter and summer, heat and cold, mountains and valleys. The fable in which these images coalesce in this poem is the familiar one of the ant and the grasshopper, or a Vermont variant thereof. Upon that fable is superimposed the cognate image of the ancient countryman's debate as to the best method of interpreting "seasonal" signs. In this poem the "ant's" part is taken by the speaker, the "grasshopper's" by two men working on his house. They discuss the meaning of the fog, cold showers, and shifts in the wind. The poet maintains, "unlucky weather's somewhere on the way." To this the visiting painters reply, "never mind the ridge." Their position is the homely analogue of that of the futurists about whom Davidson has written so eloquently in "Futurism and Archaism in Hardy and Tynbee," one of his essays in *Still Rebels, Still Yankees*. The dialogue was an old one for Davidson; it was old before him. But here he objectifies it without comment in terms of another that is even older. The sanguine and the foolhardy man (or culture) cannot or will not recognize whatever threatens him (or it), has lost the image of history as a seasonal progression, and assumes that all will be well and the linear progression of the record of his culture toward a temporal perfection continue. By willfully ignoring unmistakable omens of difficulty to come, signs and portents "along the ridge" and in the hovering fog, the futurist (and his less intellectual "double," the day-to-day-pragmatist) protects his pleasure in what remains of "summer here below." Davidson's fable is not complete; we are not subjected to the spectacle of the

final cost of blindness (the last season in the "great year" is yet to come). Of what that winter will be and how soon it will come we are laconically assured. The poet says for himself "we'll make our turn and go"; he marks "the higher warnings men should catch." Let come along who will! The image is argument enough for those who can truly perceive it. But the poet's interest is not so much in the wages of obstinate folly as in the nature of the signs which warn against such folly and the reasons why some men refuse to recognize them. This brings us once more to his language and imagery.

The painters ("two wise men") who function as foils to the speaker in "A Touch of Snow" may, in their conversation with him, be talking about one thing and he about another. A poet is both an interpreter and a maker of signs. Apart from the specifically biblical and/or supernatural ingredients in the diction of the poem, it might be taken as an argument about weather changes in the New England upcountry. But these ingredients ("last trumpet," "stars . . . that course the night," "gusts of time, of tide," "tree shapes that blaze," and the mountain which "testified" with the unmistakable "MENE") give to that conversation a second dimension. And (as always in the verse of Davidson) they are implicit in the scene as he found it. All that he brought to it in the form of a traditional sensibility only discovered their presence. They are not imported or intrusive; the concreteness of the images whose meaning they modify remains intact. Davidson's New England scenes are as convincing as those of Robert Frost (long his neighbor); if anything, they are sometimes more detailed (see his "Gradual of the Northern Summer" and "The Ninth Part of Speech" in *The Long Street*). But what he saw in them would not have come to Frost in such straightforward or unequivocally traditional terms. The biblical ingredient in Davidson's poetic idiom forces us to examine other aspects of his language, the significance of "ridge" and "valley," of "summer" and "winter" as these most evocative, traditional, and nigh unavoidable counters for the inevitable in human experience deepen through association into metaphor; and they warn us to be a bit more systematic and hardheaded in our examination of these portions of his machinery than we would be if they appeared in a Frost poem.

In the biblical tropology a valley is the locus of iniquity, of the tents of wickedness pitched round about Sodom and her sisters. On the other hand, a mountain or hill is holy ground, a place of revelation and retreat, "the habitation of God." Davidson utilized these associations throughout his poetic career. In "Lee in the Mountains" the defeated general advises his people and their descendants to "cleave" to the hills that they may "fruit upon the mountains whither [they] flee"; and in "Sanctuary" a father admonishes his son to "Go high. Go deep" when comes again their ancient enemy. The speaker in "Fire on Belmont Street" (*Lee in the Mountains*) in like spirit cries out to his fellow townsmen: "Fly from the wrath of fire to the hills/Where water is and the slow peace of time." From the hills "cometh deliverance." And with these attributions for "ridge" or "mountain" and "valley" in conjunction with the suggestion of the grasshopper/ant fable mentioned earlier in mind, the significance of "winter" and "summer" in this poem is not far to seek. For if signs of winter's coming on the mountain write ("testify") "MENE" to the valley dwellers below, then they must be understood as betokening an imminent judgment. "MENE," we remember, was the first of the enigmatic words of warning which interrupted Belshazzar's feast on the night of his downfall (Daniel 5:25-28). The stubborn relish of the present and ahistorical optimism of the painters notwithstanding, "winter" will weigh them in the balance—and, as the organization of this poem implies, all that they represent with them. Only to "see" the mountains and valleys as the poet does would mean, for them, escape from the "snow too deep, too wide." Unfortunately, grasshoppers (and futurists/pragmatists) learn only the hard way. The natural world speaks to them another language—comforting to their pride, reassuring to their fecklessness; by it they are encouraged to forget their creaturely and contingent status, their place in a regular but finally inscrutable order of things—an order in which to remember is to "understand." Fortunately part of this order is the provision which it makes for the probability of mortal forgetfulness. We may recall, again from Hebrew history, that even the people who gave the first full formulation to the signs here under discussion had some difficulty in keeping them in mind, until "encouraged." For

Davidson, that memory is the substance of poetry itself; and it has something better to depend upon for its survival than the whims of fashion.

Tate, perhaps thinking of the great importance of teleology in Davidson's poetry, complained of his old friend that he "put his faith in history." I believe Tate properly identified a quality in Davidson's work, a quality abundantly illustrated in this discussion of the metaphorical integrity of "A Touch of Snow"; but he did not (for reasons that stand behind almost forty years of mutually helpful debate about the defense of poetry in an iron age) understand it. The biblical tropology, along with the classical with which our tradition long ago combined it, has worked together with its ancient partner to shape fables and images which, when rendered in a manner suited to their development and applied to the body of the world as the poet finds it, have yet a purchase upon the ground of our being as civilized men. Out of that ground itself these images arose in the prolonged dialectic of our communal experience. They are historical as "winter," "spring," "summer," and "fall" are, in sequence, "historical"—as "valleys" and "ridges" are poetically "geographical." For Davidson they are something like reverend customs or the Saxon common law, the organic result of a vital continuum, of careful sifting and the test of time. Of their authority and capacity to restore to poetry its fit audience he instructed us in his "Poetry as Tradition" (*Still Rebels, Still Yankees*). Before them other private idioms and their progenitors must (to use a phrase from Burke) regard themselves as "men and systems on trial." For the traditional poetry is tradition, an instrument necessary to human self-definition and an interpreter of what "the mountains testify."

III

The inveterate modern may cry out against a poetics such as that which operates in "A Touch of Snow," may object to the poet's decision to suit his idiom to his fable and both to a recognizable natural scene. He may resent idiom, fable, and metaphorical texture when he perceives that all are seriously intended, that they are *meant*; for he is accustomed to structures

which serve only as a platform for verbal displays. And he may miss the mannered "tension" of the pseudometaphysical in verse whose irony comes of the weighted application of a traditional language to homely materials. The aesthetic "shock" he anticipates is not the shock of recognition, the revival of memory. He expects (yes, even comfortably demands nowadays) a clever "surprise," a reassurance of his membership in a self-designated elite whose only connection with the "funded wisdom" of his civilization is their rejection of it. But the poetry of earth is never dead. Davidson renewed his vision wherever he looked; he heard his own teaching and gave us more than "exhibitions." What he believed to be the true nature (and defense) of poetry made him comfortable with and gave him authority in a language that to many of his contemporaries was (in the phrasing of Scott) "a clasped book and a sealed fountain." That they often did not perceive the world as he did he was willing to accept in the faith that they too would in good time be "encouraged."

NOTE

1. *The Long Street*, pp. 13-14.

Angels at Forty Thousand Feet: “Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air” and the Practice of Poetic Responsibility

No modern man of letters addressed himself more consistently or with greater cogency to the question of the writer's responsibility to his time and his culture than did Allen Tate. Remarks scattered throughout his *Essays of Four Decades* and *Memoirs and Opinions, 1926-1974* bear witness to the depth of his interest in this subject.¹ Quite properly Tate is most often identified with those who take alarm at any insistence that the poet submit himself to the discipline of the rhetorician so as to serve better the “righteous” cause of some armed doctrine. Nor did he wish to see his fellows use “the rumor of their verse . . . as an excuse to appear on platforms.”² But the autonomy of art, as Tate understood it, does not presuppose its irrelevance. Solipsism was Tate's subject, not his habit. He never denied the poet's obligation to register and figure forth the recalcitrant body of the world as he apprehends it. Most specifically, the poet as the steward of the language (here broadly understood to mean all the devices of his craft and not merely diction) may, according to Tate, best do his duty by refracting—as he experiences them—the texture and substance of the forms of life before him: the “human condition” and “the total complex of sensibility and thought, of belief and experience” in which it presently

inheres. This task is particularly difficult in an age and among a people who would deny the existence of that condition, who would forget the providentially determined order of creation of which they have now become an unwilling part. The reality to which the poet's "conscience," his sense of his own "areté," directs his attention "can never change"; and he cannot expect to render it in any idiom other than that which his submissive observation, with modern eyes, of the present behavior of the old Adam will provide. But render, if a poet, he must—or else take to the platform and the tract. And to "render" as the poet (especially the modern) renders, to dramatize in the living language of his world, is to judge. For the poet "sees with, not through, the eye." His medium is the metaphor that is meant, that has (however great the reach of its suggestion) its origin and referent in an apprehension of the literal and the concrete. Merely to see is positivism; merely to judge, "angelism." R. K. Meiner is correct in insisting that Tate sought to avoid both.³ But more of this antithesis hereafter.

Allen Tate is often thought of as a very private poet. The violence of his imagery and the juxtaposition of levels of style in his work, his preference for the lyric and for the agonized *persona* in that genre—along with the admiration which his ingenuities in the employment of all manner of strategies have together inspired—have confirmed his reputation for obscurity, allusive privacy, and consequent difficulty. Were it not for his politics, his poetics, and his honesty about them both, he could have become the object of coterie enthusiasms. Indeed it appears from much recent comment on his verse that it is chiefly valued in some quarters as a formal curiosity—or that some would like to see it so classified. But such comment is invalid. Tate's poetry is, in its ultimate seriousness, consistent with his announced theories concerning the role of the poet. Implicit in his relentless focus on the subjectivity and narcissism of the speakers in most of his lyrics are an equally relentless critique and objective evaluation of life behind the looking glass. His subject and audience, because he *would* address them, have required of him the machinery he chose to employ.

The lyric was usually the appropriate vehicle for what this poet intended to say—or rather, present. Nevertheless he betimes turned to other and more public forms when provided with a

genuinely public provocation. He wrote eclogues, elegies, epistles, epodes, meditations (*sans persona*), and, on several occasions, odes. These poems are topical. However, the irony, the allusiveness, the often remarked violence of imagery are as pronounced in them as in the more characteristic lyrics. But this should not surprise. In these topical poems his subject is the same unchanging reality, pressed upon by the same temporal configurations that the lyrics explore. The choice of a semi-traditional form or setting is part of the strategy that appears in all of Tate's verse, an ironic procedure obviously not unlike that of T. S. Eliot, Auden, and other poets. In his last years his friend and fellow Fugitive Donald Davidson gave us a perceptive analysis of the distinctively modern character of one Tate poem written for a specific place and time, a Richmond reunion of Confederate soldiers held in 1932.⁴ "To the Lacedemonians" is "book" poetry. Like the more famous Tate ode (that is not an ode) addressed to the Southern dead, its speaker is a dramatic creation. It is in truth an interior monologue exploring a representative state of mind, passing judgment through that exploration on a culture that could not propitiously be addressed with singing certainty, with a straightforward ode. Or rather, it allows that state to evaluate itself. Its intricacy demands contemplation before response; the identification of its occasion and/or genre only begins its reading. What the poem implies, in the face of the spiritual condition of our civilization, calls for this indirection—if it is to "perform its nature." Other Tate poems conform to his conception of poetic responsibility by addressing a public question within a modified and dramatized version of an established genre. One of them (perhaps Tate's most traditional poem in its indebtedness to an identifiable, old-fashioned pattern) does so as part of a debate about the nature and degree of that responsibility. And, as always, it participates in that debate in such a way as to call the reader's attention back to the ineluctable facts of life, the myopic defiance of which has made the modern version of that debate—really a disguised repetition of the old Platonic quarrel in *The Republic*—possible. The Tate poem to which I refer is his much admired but ill-understood "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air."⁵

The model for Tate's wartime ode is Michael Drayton's "To

the *Virginian Voyage*" (1606). Like Drayton, the twentieth-century poet addresses a group of contemporary heroes. Tate's subject, like the Elizabethan's, is empire on the march. Drayton anticipates that in the perpetual "golden age" of "earth's only paradise" his "heroic minds" (*i.e.*, true patriotic Englishmen) will bring forth a new society blessed by the mineral and vegetable wealth of their destination—and by their "subduing hand." Tate also anticipates a conquest—of all the world, not just the "new." Drayton advises his voyagers as to how they may best steer their course. He is exultant at the prospects of their venture; and he bids them make haste. Tate likewise directs his countrymen toward what will be their ultimate objective; he doubts not the success which they will have, uses language to describe their journey (like Drayton's) which would seem to suggest his enthusiasm for it, and also urges action. Despite these similarities, however, no poem could be, in meaning, tone, and temper, more unlike Drayton's salute to the founders of Jamestown than this particular work of Tate's. The latter poem is, in fact, an inverted version of the former. Tate keeps to the conventions of his genre and emulates the structural pattern of Drayton's ode for satiric purposes, turns tribute upside down and, in the process, conspires to skewer his subjects' real masters, their "dispatchers," along with them. The result is what R. C. Beatty called a "brutally ironic summation" and "appraisal of our tradition, . . . of present-day liberal modifications of the American Dream of manifest destiny."⁶

That the causes and the significance of World War II should be connected in Tate's thought with the old harangue about the poet's proper business is understandable enough. For in 1940 and 1941, after hostilities had commenced and it had become obvious that the United States was going to be very much involved in them, Archibald MacLeish and Van Wyck Brooks issued tracts entitled *The Irresponsibles* and *The Opinions of Oliver Allston*, blaming writers such as Baudelaire, Kafka, Proust, and Eliot (and, by implication or name, all others who shared their disenchantment with the brave new world in the making) for the decline of the Republic, the rise of Fascism, and the necessity for an international bloodbath to check its progress. Thereafter the ideological fellows of this admonitory

pair kept up (for several years beyond the 1943 of Tate's ode) a hue and cry after all who had helped spread what they called "the failure of the nerve"—indeed even to the time of the Bollingen Prize award to Ezra Pound (1949). With the publication of *The Irresponsibles* and its companion piece and the confiscation by the American left of the nation's war psychosis as a stalking horse for their "angelic" post-war "plans" (*vide* Morgenthau on Germany, Roosevelt on Eastern Europe, Lattimore on China, and all their liberal fellowship on a "reformed" America), nothing could have better suited Tate's purpose in a poet's reply to both bad poetics and bad polity—while nonetheless conforming to his dicta concerning the transpolitical nature of the task of the poet—than an ironic ode.

Let us look closely at the structure and progression of tone in "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air." Before Tate begins to speak directly to his aviators, he is first very careful to set his address in a context which will make plain its burden and give to it weight and purchase.

Once more the country calls
From sleep, as from his doom,
Each citizen to take
His modest stake
Where the sky falls
With a Pacific boom.

Warm winds in even climes
Push southward angry bees
And we, with tank and plane,
Wrest land and main
From yellow mimes,
The puny Japanese.

Boys hide in lunging cubes
Crouching to explode,
Beyond Atlantic skies,
With cheerful cries
Their barking tubes
Upon the German toad.

The language of these first three stanzas is an excellent example of comic diminution; war planes are "bees," pilots, "boys . . . lunging in cubes" and "crouching to explode" (*i.e.*, like firecrackers) "barking tubes" upon "toads" and "puny . . . yellow

mimes." With these lines the inflated xenophobia of the rhetoric with which a nation girds its loins for war is uncovered for what it is—not to make the enemy seem less repugnant but rather to divert *us* from the delusion that man's everlasting difficulties can be resolved "externally" or that, as George Hemphill puts it, "the enemy within is the enemy without." Their effect is arch and almost sarcastic. In 1943, it was obvious that the Allied Powers would win the war. In both major theaters we were, as Tate's figurative summary suggests, "descending" on our opponents. Only the extent and nature (*i.e.*, meaning) of the triumphs to come remained to be determined—the question of what would be made out of that victory by the ministers of truth for the soon-to-be victors. Tate's use of "sleep" here is especially suggestive; it recalls Randall Jarrell's "Death of a Ball Turret Gunner," in which a dead airman is described as one who from his "mother's sleep . . . fell into the state" to be born (*i.e.*, into the knowledge of good and evil) only as he dies. Tate concurs with Jarrell that Christendom slept in 1939 and the years preceding—dozed comfortably in the dream of a man-made Utopia, a secular eschatology in which the state picks up where the womb leaves off and the economist and the sociologist conspire with the natural scientist to repeal mortality and all that goes with it. Both poets, moreover, imagine the awakening as an abortive experience.

In the next stanzas Tate turns to the question of what part as a poet he had in fostering the oncoming of this struggle and to review quietly and with a temporarily diminished irony what he did to forestall it. He is not yet ready to confront MacLeish and Co. The infelicities of effect produced in two other Tate poems on a like theme, "Causerie" and the "Retroduction to American History," by an uncontrolled vehemence and an abrupt, premature commitment to an attack on the objects of his anger are not in this poem repeated.

Marvelling day by day
 Upon the human kind
 What might I have done
 (A poet alone)
 To balk or slay
 These enemies of mind?

I sought by night to foal
 Chimeras into men
 Decadence of power
 That, at late hour,
 Untimed the soul
 To live the past again:

Tate's view here is retrospective. The "time" of the poem is the midwar moment when it first appeared. The poet had, he contends, marvelled at humankind even before; in their presumptuous impiety, folly, and malice men had brought to a head the festering sores which burst open with the war's beginning. And in response to the "late" hour (not long before "twilight" and "dark") he—as a maker—had suspended time and brought forth images from the past of his civilization which, he could hope, would assist its members in identifying the direction in which they drifted and thus help to pluck them from the clutches of the "enemies of mind." This recollection is Tate's "retort courteous" to the allegations that he and his antiperfectibularian contemporary poets and fictionalists had, in the Twenties and Thirties of our century, neglected to do their duty by refusing to label Fascism as the real enemy of man's hope, by looking underneath the mask of totalitarianism to explore its roots. In brief, he maintains that he has, in his earlier works, attempted to act the poet by confronting his generation with living history designed to protect it from delusion concerning its condition as a body of mortal men, from the provincialism in time that delusion engenders.

Then Tate devotes six stanzas to a summary account of the "progress" of Western man since 1776—roughly the time when the feudal community (along with sound politics, religion, and the preindustrial economy) went into a precipitous decline. As the colon after stanza five indicates, the high points or moments in the chronicle on which he chooses to focus are the sources of his "chimeras" foaled into life.

Toy sword, three-cornered hat
 At York and Lexington—
 While *Bon-Homme* whipped at sea
 This enemy
 Whose roar went flat
 After George made him run;

Toy rifle, leather hat
Above the boyish beard—
And in that Blue renown
The Gray went down,
Down like a rat,
And even the rats cheered.

In a much later age
(Europe had been in flames)
Proud Wilson yielded ground
To franc and pound,
Made pilgrimage
In the wake of Henry James.

Where Lou Quatorze held *fete*
For sixty thousand men,
France took the German sword
But later, bored,
Opened the gate
To Hitler—at Compiègne.

In this bad time no part
The poet took, nor chance:
He studied Swift and Donne,
Ignored the Hun,
While with faint heart
Proust caused the fall of France.

Sad day at Oahu
When the Jap beetle hit!
Our Proustian retort
Was Kimmel and Short,
Old women in blue,
And then the beetle bit.

After being “straight” for two stanzas now Tate reverts to the facetious vein of the first eighteen lines. The shift back to an already established style, especially since this division of the poem is concluded by two more stanzas on World War II which are in the vein with which the poem opened, connects the war with the depressing sequence of events from which Tate’s rationalist and sanguine accusers had anticipated an altogether different issue. In truth, this shift identifies the war as a consequence of the very species of thinking which the literary Jacobins recommended as a reason for fighting and a cause to serve. In each moment of history

glanced at in this catalogue, the bygone unity of Western culture is revealed as further and further dissolved. The American Revolution, as Burke had feared, let loose in both England and America doctrines at enmity with "three-cornered hats." After the War Between the States even the South succumbed to the delusion that in politically arranged "material welfare and legal justice [were to be found] the whole solutions"—in the "self-sufficiency of political man." Of this "angelic" innocence Wilson was (à la Lambert Strether) painfully disabused; and with its fruits France was "bored" into apathy. The "enemies of mind" were not spawned *ex nihilo* by the despair of a few treasonous clerks. Their ancestors were more numerous. Fascism and the perpetually impotent and misleading liberal secular eschatology to which it is a reaction are coequal causes of the unleashed savagery of the time. And almost all of the leadership of the West is implicated in one or the other—all are now "born Yankees in the race of men." Both Fascism and the "social engineers" of the left are, in so far as they deify the commonweal, enemies of the Godsweal, enemies of the spirit of Donne and Swift (altogether appropriate subjects for the study of a poet intent upon keeping men in contact with themselves). But the serious poetic development of this heterodox conception Tate still saves for later. In all eight of these stanzas the touch remains light; the poet has not yet finished with the preparation of a context for his ode proper, his address to the airmen. He even concedes a partial truth to the charge that modern history has given poets pause, has made them cautious about expecting too much of their work; and he is willing to admit that Proust's faint heart (in so far as it objectified the inward malaise of his countrymen) may have "been behind" the fall of France. The concessions are, however, obviously rhetorical; the manner in which they are offered reverses their impact. Tate is here in nothing heavy-handed. Nor will he play his cards too soon. But he has already made it plain that his tongue is in his cheek.

The next two stanzas mark the major turn in the structure of this poem and commence the resolution of the tension that structure articulates. They emerge quietly and naturally out of the carefully established thematic matrix given exposition above. In

them the implicit targets of Tate's irony are finally given names and their hegemony over the ideological conduct of the war—in another apparent concession—acknowledged. Patriotism has become what they say it is. The rationale of "beetle" squashing is in their hands. But now the irony grows heavier.

It was defeat, or near it!
 Yet all that feeble time
 Brave Brooks and lithe MacLeish
 Had sworn to thresh
 Our flagging spirit
 With literature made Prime!

Cow Creek and bright Bear Wallow,
 Nursing the blague that dulls
 Spirits grown Eliotic,
 Now patriotic
 Are: we follow
 THE IRRESPONSIBLES!

The double-entendre of "we follow/The Irresponsibles" is obvious. MacLeish and Brooks are depicted as drillmasters or athletic directors who give gymnastic discipline (direction) to the "flagging" spirits and low hopes of the "feeble time" with a rhetorical literature, a "primed" (*i.e.*, ready to explode or fire) instrument for countering the humbug of Eliot and Proust. The function of these lines is inflative; "Brave Brooks and lithe MacLeish" with all their stir and bustle are close kin to Butler's Sir Hudibras. The use of the parodic or mock-heroic in describing the huffy, cheerleader activities of these self-important antitypes of his own poetics is in perfect accord with the deflation of Tate's earlier account of the history they propose to rescue. By reducing the significance of the matters which solicit their attention while at the same time attributing heroic majesty to these attentions, he manages to heighten our awareness of the absurdity of both. With the attribution to writers who took "no part . . . nor chance" of the blague-born dullness of Cow Creek and Bear Wallow, the intention of the last lines of stanza thirteen—and indeed of the entire foregoing account of how the times got out of joint—are left unmistakably clear.

In the last section of the poem we are given to understand what Tate believes it will mean to "follow" his antagonists. As has been

suggested above, the final unit of five stanzas is the climacteric of a carefully developed tonal and structural pattern. The rest of the poem exists for its sake, makes it intelligible, and earns for it a hearing.

In it we are beyond all facetiousness and playful parody. Tate is now ready to offer his "salute" to (and definition of) the minions of his adversaries, the active agents of their doctrine. And as he has become more sombre, he has likewise turned more difficult. Here the surprising modifiers of the preceding sections of the poem persist. But their function is now neo-metaphysical and not simply mock-heroic or diminutive—their "play" for mortal stakes.

Young men, Americans!
You go to win the world
 With zeal pro-consular
 For our whole star—
You partisans
Of liberty unfurled!

O animal excellence,
Take pterodactyl flight
 Fire-winged into the air
 And find your lair
With cunning sense
On some Arabian bight

Or sleep your dreamless sleep
(Reptilian bomber!) by
 The Mediterranean
 And like a man
Swear you to keep
Faith with imperial eye:

Take off, O gentle youth,
And coasting India
 Scale crusty Everest
 Whose mythic crest
Resists your truth;
And spying far away

Upon the Tibetan plain
A limping caravan,
 Dive, and exterminate
The Lama, late
Survival of old pain.
Go kill the dying swan.

Stanza fourteen could be dropped down, with few alterations, into Drayton's Virginia ode. Its burden is that of a hundred farewell speeches to departing troop trains and ships heard during the early years of the last great war. But we have been so well forewarned that when we come to "win the world" and "zeal pro-consular / For our whole star," we hesitate and remember just what zeal has meant in the first two-thirds of the poem. The word "pro-consul" is also an occasion for second thoughts. Its apparent reference is to the performance by these pilots of their military function in the forefront of our legions—the vanguard of the "empire of liberty" (an oxymoron operative throughout these final stanzas). However, the next stanza contains elements which direct our attention to another possible meaning of "pro-consul." If the "excellence" of these youths is "animal" and their flight is to be reptilian, then the poet's identification of them may refer to an extinct simian species—a variety of apes often thought to be among the ancestors of man—and not to an order of Roman provincial officials: or perhaps (and more likely) it refers to both. In a memorable essay (which, incidentally, serves as a very useful gloss on this poem), "The New Provincialism," Tate observes that we in the West today (1945) cannot declare of ourselves what Burke said of the English in 1790, that we "have not subtilized ourselves into savagery."⁸ Thereafter he adds:

. . . It is a curious fact (I have not been able to find any history which denies that fact) that the physical welfare of man pursued as an end in itself, has seldom prospered. The nineteenth century dream of a secular Utopia produced Marxian socialism, National Socialism, and the two greatest wars of history; we ignore the causation between the dream and the wars and urge more of the same . . . to prevent other wars which the dream will doubtless have its part in causing.

Those who are ignorant of history or who would implement the schemes of others who are thus ignorant are the provincials in time referred to in the essay's title. And their provincialism makes them savage in their pursuit of the bright shape of "liberty unfurled," savage in "fanatically trying to draw other peoples into their own provincial orbit for the purpose of 'saving' them." Pterodactyls (Jurassic dive-bombers) or dragons are suitable vehicles for their barbarism. And barbarism is apparently what Tate recognized in

American plans to "win the war in order to win the peace." The fates of the Germans and Japanese are not in question in these stanzas—only the way in which their defeat will contain (by way of manipulation and the terrible, thoughtless efficiency of the sleepless-sleeping functionaries of our angelism in creating an obedient, absolutist frame of mind among the victors and their beneficiaries) a defeat for all that is gentle, pious, and wise. For there can be no civility expected from men (and doctrines) who practice "total war." As Tate says elsewhere (of Poe), those "who refuse to see nature will see nothing at all." Their peacetime conduct will be (Tate anticipates) as rigid in ignoring "the nature of man," their drive toward "standardizing" and regimenting the world after their own vision of an imagined perfection as unremitting, as their wartime faith-keeping with the "imperial eye" of Big Brother. Conditioning will prevail if they and we continue to follow the set of mind personified (in office and under laurel) by MacLeish and Co.

The last two stanzas of this ode, in which Tate picks out a bomb run and targets for his citizen-soldiers, are among the most concentrated and elusive he ever wrote. Unlike stanza fourteen, when lifted out of context they make no sense at all. What Tate advises in them is a symbolic gesture, an act in character for ambiguous seraphim, an ultimate service in the cause of irresponsibility. Or, to put matters another way, Tate is implying that for these boys to be themselves, for them to go all the way with the course they have chosen, they will have an ultimate Icarian flight to make and some special bombing to do. Everest and the swan here are counters for two of the most irreconcilable enemies faced by these pro-consuls and their imperial commanders: the "given" shape of the physical universe, not as something to be exploited or manipulated by man but (like the great woods in Faulkner's hunting stories) as the *mysterium tremendum* which recalls to him his "contingent status"; and piety, which is the acceptance of that status as irrevocable so long as we inhabit the flesh. Together they point beyond themselves to an ultimate fulfillment in the ground of being. Everest had not been climbed in 1943. And when it was, it is worth remembering that the Nepalese guide of the climbing team

spoke of the ascent as a visit to the gods, while his employers prated of "conquest," not recognizing that this crest would ever resist their truth and its mythos ever elude them. In that year the Dalai Lama, the head of that last totally religious culture on the face of the earth, likewise remained mysterious. He is here called a dying swan because his society had long been an anachronism even before the century began—and perhaps because the death of a swan had been used by several of Tate's contemporaries to signify the end of an era. Scaling Everest and bombing out the Lama would be a logical culmination and objective correlative of and for the spiritual aggression of whose growth the last great war served only as a climax—or what appeared to be a climax. To do this dirty work, to abolish all the prescriptive traditions of civilized order remaining, the reptilian bombers will, according to the "regressive" associations of this poem's metaphorical system, have to head eastward, back into time (in just the opposite direction from Drayton's explorers) to abolish memory, annul its record, and destroy its keepers. This done, man will be "free" to make his chartless, provincial way westward, toward the abyss. But first he must go back and destroy—cut loose his moorings. It is noteworthy that in the year before the appearance of this poem, an American, Col. Robert L. Scott, made a well publicized flight over Everest—and the leaders of the Roosevelt administration began (in consultation with our allies) to make preparation for administering a "unified" post-war world. "Angels" (in the nomenclature of American military radar and visual air scouting) are approaching friendly aircraft. Tate's "arrogant bombers" are "friendly" and would mount up with the wings of the heavenly host—so high as even to touch the "frazzled sun" and shed "the capital yoke." However, as are all of his "fliers" and "mounters up," they are in for a scorching.

As Tate readily admitted, his vision is "catastrophic"; and, to quote Professor Meiner once more, by standards now current, it might even be considered "un-American." But such labels belong only to shallow first responses. "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air" does a great deal more than mutter of ill omens and smack its lips in anticipation of their fulfillment. Its conclusion brings to mind Yeats's forebodings of a "rough beast" crawling toward

Bethlehem, Melville's "Dark Ages of Democracy," and the apocalyptic note sounded so often in the European literature of this century. Admittedly it goes against the grain of the widespread American assumption that our future history will (as has our past) follow a linear progression toward perfection. Yet, let us recall other Southerners with a world view like Tate's who have felt some uncertainty about the long-range implications of World War II. James Branch Cabell murmured caustically in his old age against the "seemly Americanism" of the "airplanes of altruism" and "the battleships of brotherhood."¹⁰ The late Richard Weaver devoted considerable space to the morality and meaning of total war (with specific reference to the delusions which belong especially to victors who imagine they have conquered for God) in his two studies of the declining West, *Ideas Have Consequences* and *Visions of Order*.¹¹ In the same vein Andrew Lytle has on several occasions asked cryptically, "How Many Miles to Babylon?" And Faulkner's Major de Spain (in "Shall Not Perish") gives his creator a good bit of trouble when he asserts (in 1943) that he has for nothing lost a son in war since the Republic of his fathers, his acknowledged "country," had perished in 1865.¹² All De Spain can see in the conflict is "poltroonery and rapacity and voluntary thralldom . . ."—the fruits of positivistic science and doctrinaire egalitarianism. To answer the recently bereaved aristocrat, Faulkner brings forward a woman of the plain people, a representative for a viewpoint not unlike the Major's own—save in her "hard-shell" trust that there is grace in judgment, that the struggle of World War II will be a crucible to purge mendacious and Promethean impurities out of the nation's bloodstream.

Though he had no doubt of the imminence of a well-earned judgment, Allen Tate was less certain than Faulkner that we would be instructed by it. He puts not his faith in history—not even in a loving chastisement. As he would not confuse the nation's economic and military strength with heaven's special favor, neither did he place confidence in the hope that our decline would move us to prescribe as a cure for what ails us anything other than the quack remedies which brought on that decline in the first place. The stumblings of the ugly American all across the globe, the melancholy

record of our well-meaning attempts to export and impose (on an international scale) a way of life that is not, even yet, fully acceptable to our own citizenry, to and upon other peoples with very different histories and characters—in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and most particularly in Viet Nam—have not exposed Tate as a poor prophet. After thirty-five years of the white man's burden, our "zeal pro-consular" for "liberty unfurled" is only slightly diminished. The Marxists are not alone in being doctrinaire. There is something almost as manic about our millennialism as there is in theirs. Nowadays all men insist upon a time of "Jubilo"¹³ and march mindless, like the newly freed slaves in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, toward what their creator called a "homemade Jordan." About such subjects it is not difficult to be wise—only dangerous.

Yet, if Tate has written prophecy, he has done so by inadvertence. His is not a poetry of will, but of imagination—which is, to repeat a distinction made earlier, at least in part a submissive, contemplative faculty. "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air" emerges out of a consideration of three situations at once: the war, the wartime debate about the poet's duty, and the poet's problem in attempting to address both of these without violating his own aesthetic. In each of these dilemmas he senses an irony and/or contradiction. As the contemplation persists, the irony darkens and deepens until its several targets merge and confront the reader with one of the essential paradoxes of our era, the difference between the terms we use to describe what we are about and the actual nature of our "progress." The result is a truly responsible poem, a fulfillment of all his duties on this occasion. To see (not "see through"), to make, to shape and figure forth—these are the poet's duties. Where we find them well performed we are given substantial reason to take heed, take hope, and to rejoice. We can ask no more.

NOTES

1. *Essays of Four Decades* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970); *Memoirs and Opinions, 1926-1974* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1975).
2. *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 26.
3. R. K. Meiner, *The Last Alternatives* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963), p. 70.
4. Donald Davidson, "The Meaning of War: A Note on Allen Tate's 'To the Lacedemonians,'" *Southern Review*, I. 3 N. S. (Summer, 1965), 720-730.
5. Allen Tate, *Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 95-100.
6. R. C. Beatty, "Allen Tate as Man of Letters," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 47 (April, 1948), 234-235.
7. George Hemphill, *Allen Tate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 36.
8. *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 535-546.
9. Allen Tate, *Poems*, "More Sonnets at Christmas," p. 52.
10. James Branch Cabell, *Let Me Lie* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1947), pp. 14-15.
11. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); *Visions of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964).
12. William Faulkner, *Collected Stories* (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 108.
13. Allen Tate, *Poems*, "Jubilo," p. 59.

Dr. Percy's Paradise Lost: Diagnostics in Louisiana

No one who had read Walker Percy's first two books, *The Moviegoer* (1961) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966), could have expected an easy time with his third. But in *Love in the Ruins* the reader thus conditioned must have found himself even more surprised and puzzled than he was prepared to be.¹ The work is assuredly a composition "fearfully and wonderfully made." And for the critic called upon to provide a rational account of the book's design, merits, and place in the "house of fiction," this calculated, built-in difficulty is thrice over compounded. Indeed, *Love in the Ruins* is a creation *sui generis*, shaped not at all upon the pattern of any predecessors. Few instructive or illuminating analogies are called to mind by its proportions and its themes—or by the relation of the two. Moreover, there is much about it that is especially delightful: so much that we, in amusement at masterful satiric episodes, are likely to be diverted from giving the appropriate attention to its considerable formal shortcomings.

For the aforementioned reasons the place to begin an examination of this volume is with certain generic distinctions. First of all, *Love in the Ruins*, though a work of serious fiction, is assuredly not a novel. It presents the reader with an action circumscribed and con-

tained by a recognizable and richly populated scene, burdened with an air of prophecy. Yet this apparent action carries in itself no authority, no suggestion of its own intrinsic importance. And the life of the world in which it occurs does not persuade us that it is real, that its interpersonal relationships, its politics, its science, its economics, and its history count for a straw. The book is an apocalypse or (in the current usage) a distopia, set in the late 1980's and in a South we may still recognize. Its protagonist, Dr. Thomas More (a collateral descendant of that English saint), is kept before us at all times. But we are not allowed to believe that anything is at stake in his "adventures" or in the upheavals that trouble Paradise, Louisiana, his home. Anything, that is, except the confused state of Tom More's immortal soul.

The key to the book is of course how we take Percy's "bad Catholic." What most delighted me when I first read through *Love in the Ruins* was an impression that, since his context differed so from theirs, More was not continuous with the solipsistic heroes of *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*. The interiority and paralysis of Binx Bolling and Will Barrett smother Percy's account of their misfortunes; and the same holds true of the heroes of Percy's two more recent novels. Or at least such is the reader's overwhelming impression upon completion of their stories: the impression solicited by their creator in the details of their characterization. But in my initial happy response to Percy's third production I now see that I was mistaken. For, apart from a series of fine comic moments, Dr. More has his tenuous being in a set of related reveries. He lives in theologically weighted memories and daydreams. And even when More pulls away from these, we are aware that they continue in the background and will soon swim their way back before us. Only in the postlude of his narrative, five years after he has married a "nice Presbyterian girl," is there an impression of a completed event, of static peace. And this also is private.

At the bottom of this mischief is, I suspect, what some critics have described as Percy's "Christian existentialism." Though I have not been an enthusiastic admirer of *The Moviegoer* or *The Last Gentleman*—or in more recent times of *Lancelot* and *The Second Coming*—at no point has there been a question in my mind concerning

the operative efficiency of Percy's choice of an intellectual machinery for their assemblage: that is, given his purpose in rendering Binx, Will, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar and their struggles for identity. Percy makes of these books an impressive, oblique exposé of modernity not unlike that achieved by Eliot in "Prufrock" or by Tate and Lowell in related poems. These four are, despite their wry comedy, novels of the now fashionable "lyric" variety. But a distopia ("near the end of the world") must sometimes be soberly satiric. Its action proper and enveloping action are naturally identical. And their focus is upon the course of history—ultimately upon mistakes made in the public weal by those concerned with (in the larger sense) its government. The implicit assumption is that these decisions are important, that multi-dimensional men and women do not live behind the "looking glass." Percy's "future" in this book is not thus intended; it is not the warning of an evil to come so much as it is a mere caricature of the present shape of things. And neither interests the author (or his hero) save as stimuli for movement from (to use Percy's own terms, borrowed from Kierkegaard) the "aesthetic" into the "religious mode."

Such is the tension which, to my thinking, mars the design of *Love in the Ruins*. It is both *via* and broad social comedy, with no persuasive juncture of the impulses behind its pull in these two directions. A partial answer to my animadversions might come from a reference to Northrop Frye's category of Menippean satire: a loose but stylized narrative suited to the ridicule of unsound ideas, "not primarily concerned with the exploits of heroes" but rather with "the free play of intellectual fancy." Frye further observes of this literary species that "lovemaking" is chiefly an occasion for talk as it appears within its confines. And he concludes his definition with a reference to the erudition often informing such works.²

Percy's Dr. Thomas More looks like a Menippean hero. He is occupied with three women. Furthermore, he is (like his creator) a physician and psychiatrist—much concerned with the "cure of souls." An all-around intellectual, he has invented a "lapsometer" which is capable of temporarily diminishing the effects of that event

to which its name refers. Moreover, as lover, scholar, physician, drunk, and citizen of Paradise, he is caught up in what appears to be a general revolution. He goes armed against Bantus (wild Negroes) and other asocial recalcitrants, is in conflict with his colleagues at Fedville (a center of medicine and psychiatry), and has to struggle with a devil-figure for the control of his invention. Surrounded by a plethora of troubles, he discovers substance in none of them. In addition, the hero of *Love in the Ruins* is also (as his name predicts) an orthodox Roman Catholic who sticks to his inherited convictions: does this despite a strong disposition to the comforts of the flesh and the temptations of intellectual pride. Yet his persistence is remote from the solace of the Church's ministrations. Though careful of error, he is devoted to many sins and "does as he pleases." Therefore More's life puts us in touch with all the modern cults of romantic love, with the strong currents of behaviorism (*vide* B. F. Skinner), the great schisms of contemporary theology, and the absolute passions of American politics. But all of these complications seem to choose More, not More them. The exception to this generalization is Dr. More as scientist. He follows that role without encouragement. For, from early youth, he has wanted to win a Nobel prize; and that is why the foundation-sponsored devil, Dr. Art Immelmann, approaches him in his vocational capacity: because he can really be tempted there—and also because the lapsometer, converted from diagnostic to "curative" purposes, should prove very useful in furthering the corruption it is designed to forestall. (A little of Faust and Don Juan to go with King Henry's Lord Chancellor.)

But Frye's definition makes no place for the direct confrontation with spiritual aridity such as Dr. More passes through in his momentous July week. This crisis ends with the hero's prayer to his namesake in the very instant when the powers of evil are about to swallow him up—*plus* his lapsometer, *plus* his beautiful but motherly nurse, Ellen. Yet this prayer is chiefly an internal victory. And the way for it is made clear by the vision of More's dead daughter, Samantha, which immediately precedes its occurrence: prepared for by this vision and by such earlier steps as his decision, after attempted suicide and prostrate penitence, to accept the scandal of

man's mixed nature as suitable to the "journey" of this life.

Samantha warns her father not to resist grace: in effect, warns him to cease "feasting on death" (*i.e.*, having excessive relish of his disappointments in the world). It is a mistake unusual with Catholic intellectuals, protected as they are against it by the insistence of doctrine upon the fundamental goodness of creation and competence of God's providence to accomplish His designs through His handiwork. Even the most severe medieval or early Christian "contempt for the world" never denied the beneficent implications of plenitude or our human duty to make the most of our particular gardens, however flawed. Despair and expectation of the last days have diminished this facet of More's orthodoxy. He has thought too much upon history. And paradoxically he has withdrawn his commitment to philosophical realism, his faith that there is something instructive and knowable outside the mind. Even his "scientism" is chiefly a game and a prop for his frail self-esteem. However, this focus upon Cartesian modernism worked all the way down into the fundament of a character is not according to the ordinary nature of the distopia: not according to the disposition of satire to confront easily recognizable errors on the assumption of a widely accepted code of values. It implies loving the world not as a property which can and should be preserved but as an arena for self. And that is too perilous a blunder for simple satire to confound.

Professor Frye therefore establishes no basis for a formalist defense of Percy's third book. The order of time followed in *Love in the Ruins* is a somewhat more promising ground. The tale begins with late July 4, retreats to July 1, 2, and 3, returns to the day of its beginning, and then tails off in an epilogue from later years. This arrangement allows the author to place his protagonist, to mark the action as his, and at the same time to delay its likely-to-be-swift conclusion and to develop its multitudinous comic subplots. But even this theory, though it does justice to Percy's ingenuity, will not finally expand into a satisfactory apology for the design of his work. The events of July 1, 2, and 3 are too digressive to be shaped into a unity around More. It does tighten the book to give it a brief sequel—does help, even though the abortive conclusion to the demi-revolution of Percy's expectation is hidden from our eyes and

reported only briefly. Finally, the book is strengthened all the more by the cohesion of the parts in its opening scene (More under a tree, gun in hand, overlooking a motel where his ladies are sequestered, thinking about his private difficulties and looking toward private survival) within a governing image, a summary of More's impasse. Moreover, Percy manages the progression of tone and texture so as to improve the coordination of all of these evidences of his craft. Yet I am obviously still speaking of this book as I would of a lyric. Its organization, like that of many modern poems, implies that time (and the events and people which it contains) is unimportant, that reality occurs within and is only there to be perceived. The fact that it occurs playfully, and then only after much exterior interruption, does not alter the point.

But this is enough of severity. Were Percy an artist of lesser gifts, it would be already disproportionate. Yet I must add a little concerning the already-mentioned perfection of Percy's high comedy as an achievement unto itself. It marks a progression in his thinking—a distance from the passions which, in earlier years, inspired him to a bit of foolish journalism and even more foolish public posturing. And it also draws with profit upon his clear-headed and Christian observation of the current intellectual scene. Political and religious and sexual polarization in More's Louisiana is a fine exaggeration of what we see around us. Percy's Liberals and Knotheads are already ubiquitous. They are beginning to develop the maladies which his doctor treats. Angelism marches on—even without the exacerbations of "sulphur fumes from the swamp." Likewise its firm but simple-minded enemies multiply apace. Paradise in the late 1980's remains divided concerning foreign wars, riven by the conflict of generations, frightened of urban blight, addicted to sports, ethically at sea, racially segregated, and schismatic. And the revolution abolishes none of these "scandals."

Percy, in other words, has despaired of progress *and* of prescription. If not bored by the merely topical obsessions of his peers in the craft, he is at least amused. He stands aloof with his ironic manner, his philosophical interests, his social code, his work, and his religion. Everything about his satire tells the reader that the

artist is, in these few matters, confident. And this certainty gives to him a good perspective for the gentle and friendly mockery to which he aspires. Furthermore, though they quarrel, most of Percy's characters seem to have deep reserves of goodwill toward their fellows. The prophecy is that the external pattern of things may shift about from time to time. Americans have begun to de-emphasize the automobile and neglect highway construction. But if the creature be not pushed too hard by some abstraction (or by angry reaction to such abstraction), it will persist in a reasonably pleasant condition. In this sense *Love in the Ruins* is an anti-anti-utopia. Its argument is that history, except for church history, doesn't really count for much. Menippean playfulness is the appropriate measure of its importance. And the total work has a genuine authority, despite its structural imperfections: power, even in the starkness of its theological insistence. I know of no other writer who can do this sort of thing better—not Erasmus nor Sterne nor John Barth. And though many of Percy's earlier admirers are now angered by the superior air of this offering (or by the subsequent rigor of *Lancelot*) we have reason to take heart from the diagnosis of the public follies of our age, especially where these follies are our own.

NOTES

1. Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 1971. Since the appearance of this book, Percy has written *Lancelot* (1977) and *The Second Coming* (1980), also published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. These novels recall his first two works.

2. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 309-310. For other opinions, see Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1978); and Panthea Reid Broughton, ed., *The Art of Walker Percy: Stratagems for Being* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

The Beast in Todd County: Robert Penn Warren's "Dragon Country"

Now in his seventies, Robert Penn Warren has been, in the past twenty years, perhaps the most productive of modern American poets. And also one of the best. Warren's earlier poetry was often indirect and usually ironic—according to the description of his friend Cleanth Brooks, "tough-minded." In his more recent verse the tone has shifted a few degrees toward acknowledged delight and thankful recollection, as in the soaring "Heart of Autumn." Though we have learned to admire this lyric unfolding and to share in the consolation that comes from identification with the spirit and amazing vitality of geese flying "toward sunset, at a great height," Warren's earlier poems nonetheless retain their interest, indeed grow in importance as part of the total pattern of their creator's artistic career. One of these is "Dragon Country: To Jacob Boehme," first published in 1957 in the *Yale Review*.³

Though it concerns the arrival of the Beast, Warren's "Dragon Country" is not really apocalyptic. The baleful visitation which the poem reports is continuous, scattered, personal—and will teach everyone a lesson. This beast comes and goes, but is never quite out of mind. Moreover, though the acts of the dragon are intermittent and localized (in Southern Kentucky), they have become more and

more serious. According to Warren's persona, it is no longer possible for the residents of Todd County to ignore their occurrence, or to explain away the incidents. In this section of the South, the *grim nihtsceatha* has left a permanent mark. Though civilized life will continue without the immediate release of the final trump, it will carry with it the knowledge that nothing is safe, that not every event is subject to explanation. Warren's dragon is the tangible embodiment of a surd, irreducible reality, one that is not open to scientific research, acts of Congress, or judicial decrees. Moreover, its effect on Todd County specifies that men are better off in having mystery/evil/danger dramatized in such an unambiguously concrete image as that of the "worm" which, according to St. Mark, "shall not die" (Mark 9:40). "Dragon Country: To Jacob Boehme" reads as follows:

This is the dragon's country, and these his own streams.
The slime on the railroad rails is where he has crossed the track.
On a frosty morning, that field mist is where his great turd steams,
And there are those who have gone forth and not come back.

I was only a boy when Jack Simms reported the first depredation,
What something had done to his hog pen. They called him a
God-damn liar.

They said it must be a bear, after some had viewed the location,
With fence rails, like matchwood, splintered, and earth a bloody mire.

But no bear had been seen in the county in fifty years, they knew.
It was something to say, merely that, for people compelled to explain
What, standing in natural daylight, they couldn't believe to be true;
And saying the words, one felt in the chest a constrictive pain.

At least, some admitted this later, when things had got to the worst—
When, for instance, they found in the woods the wagon turned on its side,
Mules torn from trace chains, and you saw how the harness had burst.
Spectators averted the face from the spot where the teamster had died.
But that was long back, in my youth, just the first of case after case.
The great hunts fizzled. You followed the track of disrepair,
Ruined fence, blood-smear, brush broken, but came in the end to a place
With weed unbent and leaf calm—and nothing, nothing was there.

So what, in God's name, could men think when they couldn't bring to bay
That belly-dragging earth-evil, but found that it took to air?
Thirty-thirty or buckshot might fail, but then at least you could say
You had faced it—assuming, of course, that you had survived the affair.

We were promised troops, the Guard, but the Governor's skin got thin
When up in New York the papers called him Saint George of Kentucky.
Yes, even the Louisville reporters who came to Todd County would grin.
Reporters, though rarely, still come. No one talks. They think it unlucky.

If a man disappears—well, the fact is something to hide.
The family says, gone to Akron, or up to Ford, in Detroit.
When we found Jebb Johnson's boot, with the leg, what was left, inside,
His mother said, no, it's not his. So we took it out to destroy it.

Land values are falling, no longer do lovers in moonlight go.
The rabbit, thoughtless of air gun, in the nearest pasture cavorts.
Now certain fields go untended, the local birth rate goes low.
The coon dips his little black paw in the riffle where he nightly resorts.

Yes, other sections have problems somewhat different from ours.
Their crops may fail, bank rates rise, loans at rumor of war be called,
But we feel removed from maneuvers of Russia, or other great powers,
And from much ordinary hope we are now disenthralled.

The Catholics have sent in a mission, Baptists report new attendance.
But all that's off the point! We are human, and the human heart
Demands language for reality that has not the slightest dependence
On desire, or need—and in church fools pray only that the Beast depart.

But if the Beast were withdrawn now, life might dwindle again
To the ennui, the pleasure, and the night sweat, known in the time before
Necessity of truth had trodden the land, and our hearts, to pain,
And left, in darkness, the fearful glimmer of joy, like a spoor.⁴

The narrative of the poem is followed by a brief summary of what the dragon has done to the thinking of these Kentuckians and that is followed in turn by the line toward which all that reportage and comment have been building in slow and steady increments through the first ten stanzas: "And from much ordinary hope we are now disenthralled." The "language for reality" that does not depend "on desire, or need" occurs to us only when we are brought up against home truths by the kind of dramatic experience that cancels "ordinary hope" and "disenthral[s]" us from the modern varieties of the endemic human delusion—that by the agency of science or politics we can "fix it," whatever our problem may be. To accomplish so drastic a correction, the source of that dramatic experience must be outside of our mind and beyond the control of our technology. Only then do we get the point. But there is a

positive side to this process, and to the realization that it brings. "Necessity of truth," the recognition of our contingency, though painful, is finally the precondition of all human delight. As Warren has written elsewhere, from 38,000 feet the optimism of Emerson, that "there is no sin/Not even error . . .," seems plausible. At that altitude there is "nothing specific" from "the process of living" to prevent us from "forgiving God," and equivalent presumptions.⁵ Residence in dragon country, with hearts "trodden . . . to pain," precludes such dwindling and emptiness.

A poetic *peripeteia* which speaks of being "disenthralled" from the restraints of "ordinary hope" is language which calls to mind the poetry of Warren's mentor, John Crowe Ransom, or the work of his old friend (and fellow Kentuckian) Allen Tate. The burden of "Dragon Country" is certainly compatible with that of many poems by Ransom, Tate, and other members of their circle. And with Warren's exploration of the sanguine rationalism of Thomas Jefferson in his long poem, *Brother to Dragons*.⁶ But the texture of Warren's verse is distinctively his own in this and other lyrics, an idiom contained within a prosody, mixing the homely with the eloquent in a fashion which suggests the cadence of reflective discourse—Warren's own inimitable speech. In the unfolding of "Dragon Country" this balance of "the pure and impure in poetry" shows to best effect in Warren's account of how Todd County in the beginning attempted to explain away what "couldn't be true." First, Jack Simms's neighbors called him a "God-damn liar." Then they spoke conventionally of bears. Finally, looking at the evidence of his hog pen, they "felt in the chest a constrictive pain"; or, confronted with the ruin left by other dragon raids, they turned away from looking at the place of death. Then they pursued the terrible track of this monster, and only then they fell silent, lied about those "who have gone forth and not come back," and avoided being out of doors at night. The sequence of reactions is plausibly structured, full of the earthy, the commonplace, the painfully particular. "When things had got to the worst," Todd County believed in the Beast, but was even then still mistaken when it "got religion," yet "prayed only that the Beast depart." For until the "language for

reality" which their local apocalypse provided can be replaced by some other image equally resistant to their desire to deceive themselves, such a departure would be quite premature.

What Warren intends by "a fearful glimmer of joy" could easily be mistaken for incipient Manicheanism. But such a reading of the passage is incorrect. True enough, the report of monsters lurking in the back country always arouses a stir of public interest and even of anticipation. There is a suggestion in Warren's poem that human beings were made to live dangerously amidst perils, that ennui is the only alternative to the kind of drama in our lives that necessitates confrontation with pain and death and dread. Or, in the language of Victor L. Strandberg, "man's spiritual destiny . . . requires that knowledge of the world's evil must be accepted and ingested entirely."

Speaking of great reptiles only, I can think of several recent instances of remarkable reports. In northern Alabama in 1955 and then in 1956 and 1958, a great serpent (as big around as a telephone pole) was seen on a number of occasions. Traffic was delayed for some time while the snake crossed the highway. Near a lake in Wellington, Kansas, in the late summer of 1969, "a big snake" terrorized an entire community. In Indonesia, in 1979, huge pythons that had eaten several people attacked bulldozers which were clearing land near their lair.⁸ Such stories can be collected from any careful reading of American rural newspapers published during the course of a summer. And this is to saying nothing of Big Foot and other "monsters" which haunt the swamps and mountains and the fringes of our consciousness, appearing and disappearing with such ease and rapidity that we must believe that though huge they can also fly.

As Strandberg has observed, the Beast is Warren's image of "the irrational horrors that circumscribe the ruined world." And as the old poets realized, such horrors move us to cherish all the more shelter and a good fire and the company of those we love and trust.

In subtitling the poem "To Jacob Boehme," Warren raises the question of why there should be suffering and evil and uncertainty

in a world controlled by a just and loving God, the God to whom the Baptists and the Catholics in "Dragon Country" have prayed for deliverance from the "belly-dragging earth-evil." These prayers are "off the point" in the context of Warren's natural theology because, to quote Strandberg again, ". . . dread gives the world its tragic possibility of a larger meaning."¹⁰ I say "natural theology" because Warren's focus is on human nature, not providential design. But it is not to strain the text when we find in this poem and in his other works suggestions of something like the doctrine of the Fall. The moral universe which the dragon stalks by night is post-lapsarian. It is ruled over, according to Jacob Boehme, by that chief of all dragons, who had once a brighter, fairer shape but grew to admire himself too much in contemplating his own perverse freedom.¹¹ In the view of a modern interpreter, Boehme himself was "tormented" by the reality of evil, by the presence in the world of powers irrational and malign in their impact on the fortunes of men.¹² But if we are incapable of "admitting the element of horror in life, conceding the element of mystery, facing the terrifying truth," then, as Boehme realized, we cannot think of ourselves as free or hope by our actions to know any of that joy in the hope of which we persist.¹³

In Boehme's language, the "divine light" usually manifests itself through something other, in a process of contrast. And if the "other" is unreal, then so is our freedom to resist the principalities and powers in our mind for which it is a symbol. To a remarkable degree, Boehme's *Six Theosophic Points* is a gloss upon the concluding lines of Warren's "Dragon Country." The dedication fits, if we examine its propriety. By making men aware of how fragile and easily threatened are the good and precious things in their lives, they are restrained from taking for granted what they otherwise might lose. Moreover, the dragon was a marvelous way of preventing the matter of Warren's poem, especially its last nine lines, from becoming too propositional and abstract. The entire poem is, in one restricted sense, a "justification of God's ways to man," though based more on a knowledge of the creature than on a presumption concerning the secret ways of the Great I Am. Of the Deity, nothing is implied beyond His awareness of *how we are*: how

inflated in our own conceit. To be put in mind of our contingency, some shock is necessary. Warren as poet says something of this sort frequently—as, for an instance, in "Summer Storm (Circa 1916), and God's Grace."¹⁴ There the numinous is suggested by violence in nature. Kentuckians are rendered speechless by "God's flail," a power beyond their ken, mysterious and "wholly other," discouraging to mortal pride. A beast does even better.

Flannery O'Connor has observed that Southerners have "a distrust of the abstract, a sense of dependence on the grace of God, and a knowledge that evil is not simply a problem to be solved but a mystery to be endured."¹⁵ Southerners tend to doubt that the "... ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of mankind."¹⁶ Living with a dragon, of one sort or another, prevents such delusions. Though our finitude is hidden from us by the pattern of modern life, a few of the old reminders of providential authority persist. Concerning their function, that of preserving the memory of a better ontology, Warren has written some of his finest verse. He offers no easy hope. Yet, more recently, and out of such a sense of our mortal station, he advises those initiated in home truth,

We must try

To love so well the world that we may believe, in the end, in God.¹⁷

If we may infer so much from the evidence of his verse, in this last labor he is more and more frequently successful.

NOTES

1. Cleanth Brooks, *The Hidden God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 98.
2. The poem concludes his collection *Now and Then: Poems 1976-1978* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 74-75. This collection was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, Mr. Warren's third.
3. See *Yale Review*, XLVI (Spring, 1957), 336-338.
4. A convenient text of "Dragon Country" appears in Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Poems: 1923-1975* (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 258-260.
5. The lines quoted are from "His Smile," "The Wart," and "Does the Wild Rose?" in the group of poems gathered under the heading "Homage to Emerson, on Night Flight to

New York," *Selected Poems: 1923-1975*, pp. 153, 154, and 158.

6. *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices* (New York: Random House, 1953). Random House published Warren's revised version of this poem in 1979.

7. Victor H. Strandberg, *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1977), p. 72.

8. The report of the great pythons of Indonesia appears in *Science Digest*, 89, No. 5 (June, 1981), 32, in a letter of Gregory De La Castro.

9. *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, p. 72.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See p. 99 of Jacob Boehme's *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), tr. by John Rolleston Earle.

12. See p. xvi of Nicolas Berdyaev's essay "Unground and Freedom," which appears on pp. v-xxxvii of the University of Michigan edition of *Six Theosophic Points*.

13. Brooks, *The Hidden God*, p. 111.

14. *Selected Poems: 1923-1975*, pp. 240-241.

15. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, selected and edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 209.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

17. *Selected Poems: 1923-1975*, "Masts of Dawn," p. 116. Useful comment on Warren's recent verse appears in A. L. Clements's "Sacramental Vision: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren," pp. 216-233 of *Critical Essays on Robert Penn Warren*, ed. by William Bedford Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981). See also James H. Justus, *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

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INDEX

- Aeschylus, 132-133
 Apocalypse, theme of, 76, 90-91, 126, 133, 177, 180, 193-96, 201, 207
 Auden, W. H., 104, 177, 185
- Beatty, R. C., 186
 Bishop, John Peale, 91
 Beverley, Robert, 21
 Brooks, Cleanth, 139, 143, 207
 Brooks, Van Wyck, 186, 192
 Burke, Edmund, 118, 181
 Butler, Samuel, 192
- Cabell, James Branch, 197
 Carroll, Lewis, 100-02
 Cato the Censor, 21-22
 Cicero, 18, 20, 21, 23
 Comedy, 41, 45, 54-55, 68
 Composite protagonist, 30-31, 40-41
 Conrad, Joseph, 53, 154
 Cowan, Louise, 77, 117-18, 175
 Crane, Stephen, 106
- Dante, 93-94, 103, 106
 Davidson, Donald, 12-13, 25, 68, 74, 91, 108, 112, 114-34, 144, 175-82, 185
 "Lee in the Mountains," 120-25
 "The Tall Men," 128-30
 "The Case of Motorman 17: Commitment Proceedings," 132-33
 "A Touch of Snow," 175-82
 Dostoevski, Feodor, 26
 Drayton, Michael, "Ode to the Virginian Voyage," 185-86, 194
 Dramatic monologue, 78-79, 118-19
 Dryden, John, 17, 23
 Duff, J. Wright, 18
- Elegiac mode or "action," 54, 67-68, 135-45, 212-13
 Eliot, T. S., 38, 78, 80, 85, 106, 115, 118, 129, 136, 177, 185-86, 202
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 115, 210
 Epic, 20-21
- Faulkner, William, 13, 25, 29-39, 40, 45, 48-62, 64, 91, 98, 114, 122, 127, 160, 195, 197
 The Unvanquished, 29-39
 The Reivers, 48-62
 Ford, Ford Madox, 92
 Frost, Robert, 144, 179
 Frye, Northrop, 202-04
 Fussell, Paul, 54, 126
- Gemeinschaft*, 30-32, 39, 41, 46, 60, 67, 118, 158-59
 Gordon, Caroline, 13, 25, 30, 38, 40, 64, 91, 123, 157-74
 "The Forest of the South," 159-65
 "Hear the Nightingale Sing," 165-69
 "The Ice House," 169-72
 Grayson, William, 22-23
- Hardy, Thomas, 144
 Hemphill, George, 188
 Homer, 132-33
 Horace, 19, 22-23
 Housman, A. E., 141, 144
 Hubbell, J. B., 30
- Inge, M. Thomas, 116, 122, 123
- James, Henry, 29, 30, 40, 59, 80, 96, 191
 Jarrell, Randall, 188
 Jones, Howard Mumford, 20-21
 Joyce, James, 25, 29-30, 40, 96
- Kennedy, John Pendleton, 30
 Kierkegaard, Soren, 202
 Krey, Laura, 25

- Langbaum, Robert, 80
 Livy, 21
 Lowell, Robert, 202
 Lytle, Andrew, 13, 64, 74, 96, 149-56, 160
 "Alchemy," 149-56
- MacLeish, Archibald, 186-95
 Meiners, R. K., 108, 184, 196
 Melville, Herman, 151, 162, 197
 Menippean satire, 202-03
 Montgomery, Marion, 129
 Moral essay, 22-23
- O'Connor, Flannery, 213
 Ode, 185-86, 194-96
- Percy, Walker, 13, 200-06
 Love in the Ruins, 200-06
 Pierce, Ovid Williams, 30
 Plato, 93, 94, 98, 118, 136, 140, 185
 Plutarch, 20, 109
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 18, 195
 Pope, Alexander, 23, 85-87, 160
 Porter, Katherine Anne, 64
 Pound, Ezra, 115, 177, 187
 Proust, Marcel, 186, 191
- Ransom, John Crowe, 13, 25, 74, 131, 135-45, 160, 210
 "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," 136-40
 "Janet Waking," 141-42
 "Dead Boy," 142-44
 The Republic of Letters, 12, 18, 116-19, 187-93
 Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, 25, 91
 Rock, Virginia, 77
 Roman literature, 17-28
Romanitas (or the corporate spirit), 11-13, 19-20, 26, 95, 118
 Rubin, Louis D., Jr., 25
- Sallust, 21
 Shakespeare, William, 26, 30
 Simonides of Ceos, 89
 Simpson, Lewis P., 18
 Smith, Captain John, 20-21
 Stephens, Alexander H., 23
 Strandberg, Victor L., 211-12
- Tacitus, 20
 Tate, Allen, 13, 20, 24-26, 64, 68, 73-113, 116, 118, 123, 131, 144, 177, 183-99, 202, 210
 "Horatian Epode," 80-81
 "Death of Little Boys," 81-83
 "Homily," 83
 "The Subway," 84-85
 "Mr. Pope," 85-87
 "Ode to the Confederate Dead," 87-89
 "To the Lacedemonians," 89-91
 "The Mediterranean," 92-94
 "Aeneas at Washington," 94-95
 "Message from Abroad," 96-97
 "Jubilo," 97-99
 "Last Days of Alice," 100-02
 "The Cross," 103-04
 "Winter Mask," 104-08
 The Fathers, 109-11
 "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air," 185-99
 Taylor, John (of Caroline), 21-22
 Tillyard, Sir Eustace, 30
 Timrod, Henry, 89
- Virgil, 19, 22, 25-26, 92-93, 131
 Voegelin, Eric, 90
- Wade, John Donald, 25-26, 116
 Warren, Robert Penn, 13, 63, 74, 139, 207-14
 "Dragon Country," 207-14
 Washington, George, 21
 Weaver, Richard, 23, 30, 75, 116, 197
 Webster, John, 79, 87
 Welty, Eudora, 13, 25, 30, 38, 40-47, 63-69, 160
 Delta Wedding, 40-47
 Losing Battles, 63-69
 Ponder Heart, 45
 Robber Bridegroom, 45
 Optimist's Daughter, 45
 Wordsworth, William, 115, 129
- Yeats, William Butler, 12, 39, 78, 105, 107, 115, 117, 160, 177, 196
 Young, Stark, 29
 Young, T. D., 116, 120, 122

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Professor Bradford teaches in the Department of English and in the Graduate Institute of Philosophic Studies at the University of Dallas. He has written numerous articles in literature, intellectual history, and political thought. With George Core he is the co-editor of Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (1968). He is the editor of *The Form Discovered: Essays in the Achievement of Andrew Lytle* (1973), and of a new edition of *Arator*, by John Taylor of Caroline (1977). His monograph, *Rumors of Mortality: An Introduction to Allen Tate* was published in 1969, and his widely-acclaimed *A Better Guide than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution* appeared in 1979. *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the Constitution* was published in 1982.

Professor Bradford has served as president of the Southwestern American Literature Association, and he is an advisory editor of *The Occasional Review* and of *Modern Age*.

